

Series: John
Title: The Brazen Serpent
Text: John 3: 14-15
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John 3:14: And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: 15: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

The Lord took Nicodemus back to passage of scripture he would have been—or should have been—familiar with, the brazen serpent in the wilderness. It is a type—a picture—of Christ. It illustrates the way God saves sinners. Our Lord Jesus used this Old Testament picture to illustrate the gospel to Nicodemus.

John 3:14: And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up:

The cross of Christ was a must. If holy God will save guilty sinners then he must do it in a way that is just. If God's law is not executed upon the guilty then God is not just. God cannot show mercy to sinners at the expense of his justice. He is holy and just. Christ said "so must the Son of man be lifted up..."

John 3: 15: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

The only way a guilty sinner can have eternal life is through believing on the Lord Jesus Christ. The only way a guilty sinner can be saved from perishing is through faith in Christ—"that whosoever believeth in him should not perish." Believing on Christ means we cease from putting any confidence in our flesh and our works. Would you learn the way of mercy and life? Then follow this story with me.

Numbers 21: 4: And they journeyed from mount Hor by the way of the Red sea, to compass the land of Edom: and the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way. 5: And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread. 6: And the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died. 7 Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD, and against thee; pray unto the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people. 8: And the LORD said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. 9: And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.

OUR PROBLEM

Numbers 21: 5: And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread. 6: the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died.

They spoke against God. The first cause of our problem is that we sinned against God. The people spoke against God, and against Moses. Moses is a type of the law. Since Moses was a prophet he also typifies the word of God. Who was our transgression against in the garden in Adam? We sinned against God when we broke God's law. The result was sin and death by sin. "*The LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died.*"

Picture the scene. All these poisonous vipers were everywhere. They bit the people. Their venom poisoned the people. So it is that the serpent entered the garden. When Adam sinned then sin entered and death by sin. Adam being a representative Head, a seminal Head, all his people were in him. Therefore, what Adam did, we did. We came under the curse and condemnation of the law and ALL DIED!

Romans 5:12: Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:

God gave them bread from heaven and water from the rock. Both typified Christ. But they said there is no water and our soul loatheth this light bread. That Rock is Christ! That bread from heaven is Christ! But how many in our day find fault with the true Christ of the Bible? How many that profess to believe Christ but soon say we loathe this light bread? They want to hear a message about themselves, their works, their serving. So they grow to loath the preaching of Christ and him crucified, the true Bread from heaven. (Jn 6: 28-35).

Isaiah 55: 7: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. 8: For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD.

NO CURE IN US

There was no cure for the fiery serpents' bite. We cannot produce a cure for the guilt and condemnation of sin. Spiritual death is in us. Physical death is upon us. Eternal death awaits us. "Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death" (Ja 1: 15).

The people went to Moses asking him to intercede for them with God. Only Christ the Intercessor can deliver. Only the great mercy of God could deliver them. Grace is God giving us what we do not deserve. Mercy is God not giving us what we do deserve. God's grace and mercy are found only in the one we sinned against, God in human flesh, the Lord Jesus Christ.

THE CURE GOD PROVIDED

Numbers 21: 8: And the LORD said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole:...v9: And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole,...

Who provided the remedy? The LORD did! He told Moses to make a serpent of brass, the very thing that was causing the death and lift it up on a pole.

In eternity, before sin entered and death by sin, God the Father chose a people to be represented by Christ who he would call to faith in Christ. God is just yet God shows mercy to chosen sinners. But how can God be just and merciful? Only by sending his Son to represent his people.

He told Moses to make a serpent of brass, the very thing that was causing the death and lift it up on a pole. A serpent was made in the likeness of the fiery serpents. The only way to save his people was that Christ must be made like unto his brethren.

Hebrews 2:17: Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.

Romans 8: 3: For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh:

Galatians 4: 4: But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, 5: To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.

The serpent of brass had no venom. Christ knew no sin. He was tempted yet without sin. But God had them make a serpent like what was biting them and lift it up on a pole. Christ said he must be lifted up. God made his Son the thing that was killing his people in order to be just in putting away our sin, justifying us, making us righteous in Christ.

2 Corinthians 5: 21 For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

The serpent in the garden was cursed of God. God told Moses to make the cursed thing and lift it up on a pole. So Christ must be made a curse for us. He died under the strict justice of God.

Galatians 3: 13: Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree:

Brethren, this is what Christ meant when said, “as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up.” There was no other way for God to be just and the Justifier of his people. By Christ being made sin for us, God executed justice on his Son instead of his people. Therefore, his justice has been honored upon all those for whom Christ died. Christ made all whom he represented the righteousness of God in him.

Romans 3: 25: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation [satisfaction] through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; 26 To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

The law is satisfied toward God’s people. Judgment is settled in Christ. God is just to show his people mercy. That is why it was a must that Christ be lifted up on the cross. Now, seeing that all the work is finished of justifying his people, what is left then for you and me to do to have this free justification from our sin?

LOOK AND LIVE

Numbers 21: 8:...and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. 9:...and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.

John 3: 14: And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: 15: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

Notice what God did NOT tell them to do. AW Pink has these seven things God did not tell them to do.

One, they were NOT told to produce their own cure to heal their wounds; we are not saved by our works.

Two, they were not told they would be healed by ministering or serving others who were wounded. Sinners cannot save ourselves. We certainly cannot save others.

Three, they were not told to fight the serpents. We cannot stop our sin. We must be born of God, given faith and made willing to believe on Christ by the power and grace of God.

Fourth, they were not told to make an offering to the serpent on the pole. There is nothing for you to do to make yourself ready to come to Christ. Come as you are confessing your sin and Christ shall show you mercy! The leper said, “Lord if you will, you can make me whole.”

Fifth, they were not told to come to Moses and “say” a prayer. Salvation is not in God’s preacher. It is not in religious ceremony or works. Salvation is looking to Christ, believing on Christ, casting all our care on Christ.

Six, they were not told to go to the law. The law declares us guilty. It shuts our mouth. The end of the law is Christ Jesus for all who believe. Through faith in Christ God imputes the righteousness of Christ—the righteousness of the law—to the believer.

Seven, they were not told to look at their wounds. Some mourn over their sin. They are constantly speaking of how sinful they are. But salvation is not by mourning your sin. Indeed, a sinner will mourn our sin when God grants us repentance and faith. But never look to your mourning. Look to Christ. He alone is the remedy for our sins.

That's right! God commanded them to look to the serpent on the pole. Think how absurd that command was to those surrounded by venomous vipers. Any practical man would know a simple look will not save him from poisonous snakes, especially if he has already been bitten. Brethren, God sends us trials in this life like he sent them those snakes. In every situation God is teaching us that the only way to be saved is to look to Christ. But what do we do? We reason that it is impossible for us to get out of our situation except we put our hand to the work. What is the difference in that than saying you can only save yourself by your works? None. In every trial of providence, God is instructing his people over and over the greater salvation is only by looking to Christ. In every trial now, in order to be saved from our sins, whatever the case—look to Christ. Those that looked lived! Those who do nothing else except look to Christ, are given eternal life!

John 3: 14: And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: 15: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. 16: For God so [after this manner] loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. 17: For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. 18: He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

Christ alone is salvation! Did you reckon those who knew they were bitten and only had moments to live, those who knew they were far too gone to do anything to save themselves, do you think they had to be talked into looking? If God has made you see your sin at it truly is then you will look to Christ.

Isaiah 45:...there is no God else beside me; a just God and a Saviour; there is none beside me. 22: Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.

AMEN!