

Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

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Faith is Simply....Looking

July 5, 2015

Sermon Text: Numbers 21:1-9

Scripture Reading: John 3:1-21

Introduction-

Here is what I call “Gandalf Theology” –

“PIPPIN: I didn't think it would end
this way.

GANDALF: End? No, the journey
doesn't end here. Death is just
another path, one that we all must
take. The grey rain-curtain of this
world rolls back, and all turns to
silver glass, and then you see it.

PIPPIN: What? Gandalf? See
what?

GANDALF: White shores, and
beyond, a far green country under
a swift sunrise.

PIPPIN: Well, that isn't so bad.

GANDALF: No. No, it isn't.”

This is the religion so many people
who claim to be Christians embrace
today. They are guilty of despising the
Cross. Here is another common
example--

*This poem is often read at funerals. The
author, Henry Scott-Holland (1847 -
1918), a priest at St. Paul's Cathedral of
London, did not intend it as a poem, it
was actually delivered as part of a
sermon in 1910. The sermon, titled,
"Death the King of Terrors" was
preached while the body of King Edward
VII was lying in state at Westminster.*

Death Is Nothing At All

Death is nothing at all.

It does not count.

I have only slipped away into the next
room.

Nothing has happened.

Everything remains exactly as it was.

I am I, and you are you,
and the old life that we lived so fondly
together is untouched, unchanged.
Whatever we were to each other, that we
are still.

Call me by the old familiar name.
Speak of me in the easy way which you
always used.
Put no difference into your tone.
Wear no forced air of solemnity or
sorrow.

Laugh as we always laughed at the little
jokes that we enjoyed together.
Play, smile, think of me, pray for me.
Let my name be ever the household word
that it always was.
Let it be spoken without an effort,
without the ghost of a shadow upon it.

Life means all that it ever meant.
It is the same as it ever was.
There is absolute and unbroken
continuity.
What is this death but a negligible
accident?

Why should I be out of mind because I
am out of sight?
I am but waiting for you, for an interval,
somewhere very near,
just round the corner.

All is well.
Nothing is hurt; nothing is lost.
One brief moment and all will be as it
was before.
How we shall laugh at the trouble of
parting when we meet again!

I wonder if the preacher of this sermon
has found that his death was “nothing
at all” after all.

I. Freedom From the Power of Death – Look and Live

This is the time of year that
Independence and freedom are
celebrated in America. The ultimate
and greatest freedom is not that
enjoyed by Americans, but the
Independence from another kind of
tyranny from which Christ has freed
us.

Hebrews 2:14-15 Since therefore
the children share in flesh and
blood, he himself likewise partook
of the same things, that through
death he might destroy the one
who has the power of **death**, that
is, the devil, (15) and deliver all
those who through fear of **death**
were subject to lifelong slavery.

Every human being born into this
world is born into slavery. The Tyrant
at the head of the kingdom of
darkness, the Devil, reigns over all

who are its citizens – or rather, its slaves. Fear reigns in that evil kingdom, specifically, the fear of death. Death is mentioned 3 times in this text. Notice it carefully. The power of death. The fear of death.

Death is the result of – sin.

Romans 5:12 Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned--

Once man fell by disobedience to God, motivated and deceived by the lie of the serpent that man could himself be God, he died. He was evicted from Eden and from the light and life of the presence of God, embarking on an existence outside of Eden under the curse where the words “you shall surely die” must have continually echoed in his mind.

It is the same today. Men and women and children, outside of Christ, exist in this dark kingdom of the devil who holds power over them by the power and fear of *death*.

The Devil is the Accuser. He is a murderer. And he uses the Law of God, which condemns the sinner and demands our death, as the instrument by which he keeps his

slaves enslaved. “There’s no hope for you. You have sinned against the Lord. You have broken His Law, and His Law is unbending. It pronounces you cursed and sentences you to eternity alienated from God in the realm of death. Death of the body. Death of your soul.

And in these accusations, the Devil *is telling the truth!* (though his “truth” is always mixed with or founded upon a lie). That is why he has that power of death over his prisoners. Paul concurs-

Galatians 3:10 For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them."

As long as God’s holy Law (call it the 10 commandments if you will) remains the defining covenant (relational terms or contract) between a human being and God, that man is cursed. He is dead to God, and headed for eternal death in Hell. He is under God’s just condemnation, because anyone who tries to set themselves right with God *by their own so-called good deeds or works*, is going to miserably fail. The sin that is in all humanity will see to that.

Romans 8:7-8 For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. (8) Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

If you are not in Christ, if you have never come to genuine faith in Him and been regenerated by His Spirit, then here is a shocking truth for you:

Nothing you have ever done in your entire life is pleasing to God. You have never once, not even in the most minute way, submitted in obedience to the Law of God. You are not pleasing to Him. You are under His just condemnation.

The purpose of the perfect life of Jesus Christ and His death on the cross is set out clearly in the New Testament--

Galatians 3:11-13 Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for "The righteous shall live by faith." (12) But the law is not of faith, rather "The one who does them shall live by them." (13) Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us--for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"--

See it? Either YOU are going to be cursed by God and sent to Hell, or Christ is going to be cursed by God and sent to Hell for you. It's one or the other for every human being without exception. And if you choose to be "justified" before God by your own doings and efforts and "good deeds," then Paul tells you what will happen right here – You will not be declared righteous by God, you will be pronounced cursed by Him on that Day when we all stand before Him.

And the ENTIRE thing is completely unnecessary!! All the sinner need do is look in faith to Christ and place his trust in Christ's work of redemption and Christ's obedience to God's Law FOR US, and the curse turns to life.

Romans 8:1-4 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. (2) For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. (3) For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, (4) in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

That is the good news of the gospel!

2 Corinthians 5:21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

II. Looking to Christ in Faith

Now then, many people have heard the gospel and yet remain dead in their sins, under God's curse, still enslaved to the kingdom of the devil. They fear death and expend much energy trying to deny it. Yet they remain unrighteous before God. Why?

Because they simply will not look to Christ and live.

Numbers 21:1-9 When the Canaanite, the king of Arad, who lived in the Negeb, heard that Israel was coming by the way of Atharim, he fought against Israel, and took some of them captive. (2) And Israel vowed a vow to the LORD and said, "If you will indeed give this people into my hand, then I will devote their cities to destruction." (3) And the LORD heeded the voice of Israel and gave over the Canaanites, and they devoted them and their cities to destruction. So the name of the place was called Hormah.

(4) From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom. And the people became impatient on the way. (5) And the people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food."

(6) Then the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. (7) And the people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you. Pray to the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people. (8) And the LORD said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live." (9) So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.

We see these points in this text of Scripture:

1. A Prayer of Faith and The Lord's Wonderful Deliverance 1-3
2. The Grumbling of Unbelief 4-5

3. The Lord's Judgment 6

4. Repentance and The Lord's Remedy 7-9

I want to first make some general observations about these 4 points, and then focus our attention on this curious thing – a bronze serpent on a pole.

A. A Prayer of Faith and the Lord's Wonderful Deliverance

In the Wilderness, the Israelites faced many strong and fearsome enemies. Here they met another one and tasted an initial defeat. They were attacked and some of their countrymen were taken POW. Their response was one of faith. They prayed and vowed to the Lord that if He would give them victory, they would give Him the enemy cities and possessions as an offering to Him. All would be destroyed.

The Lord answered their prayer, and in faith they fulfilled their vow to Him. There were no Achans that day. Not a single possession was kept for themselves. It was a good and memorable day.

B. The Grumbling of Unbelief

Have you ever noticed, as you read your Bible, how fickle human beings are? One moment you have this

incredible act of faith, the next a mind-boggling depth of sin. In fact, so often do we see this in the Old Testament that whenever we read of some great victory of faith (Elijah at Mt. Carmel), we get nervous because we know sin and failure is probably right around the corner. So it was in this case –

And the people became impatient on the way. (5) And the people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food.

This is the unbelieving, unthankful heart being revealed in a day of trial. Ultimately, the unsaved person will blame and accuse the Lord. The unregenerate mind is one of entitlement – that God somehow "owes" us.

We see here a plain picture of what it is in God's sight for someone who does not know the Lord, yet who pretends to be one of His people, to come to the Lord's Table. Just as these Israelites despised and loathed the manna in the wilderness, so such a person today loathes and despises the body and blood of Jesus Christ.

C. The Lord's Judgment

Then the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died.

Serpents. Snakes. Poisonous, deadly snakes. That's a pretty severe judgment! It would have been a horrible scene. Snakes everywhere. It was the Lord giving these evil people just punishment by giving them exactly what they wanted – life in the Serpent's realm.

Objects and events in the Bible were not just put there at random. They mean something. They convey a message from the Lord. In this case, death by a serpent as a picture of death by sin. Sin came into the world through the Devil's appearance in Eden. He is repeatedly called the serpent in Revelation:

Rev_12:9 And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world--he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

Rev_12:14 But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle so that she might fly from the serpent into the wilderness, to the

place where she is to be nourished for a time, and times, and half a time.

Rev_12:15 The serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, to sweep her away with a flood.

Rev_20:2 And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years,

God gives the sinner what he or she wants. Life in Christ or death in the serpent's realm. That is what this is a picture of. In their rebellion against God, they chose the serpent.

D. Repentance and The Lord's Remedy 7-9

With this in mind, the Lord's remedy begins to make perfect sense:

(7) And the people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you. Pray to the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people. (8) And the LORD said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live." (9) So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit

anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.

Repentance and faith. "We have sinned." They plead for mercy, and they receive it in a rather curious form – an image of one of these fiery serpents affixed to a high pole. It was to be set up where all could see it *and all they bitten, dying person needed to do to be cured was to look at it.*

The New Testament translates this Old Testament symbol for us –

John 3:14-21 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, (15) that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. (16) "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. (17) For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. (18) Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. (19) And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. (20) For everyone who does wicked

things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. (21) But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God."

What was the "gospel" (good news) announced by Moses there in the Wilderness? "Here is God's remedy for the poison and death working in you. LOOK AND LIVE! You are dying. All you need do to be healed is to look.

And the Lord Jesus Christ applied that bronze serpent in the wilderness to Himself. How?

Christ was lifted up on a pole – the Cross – for all to see. And all who will look at Him will be cured of the poison of sin that is working eternal death in their souls.

Why a serpent? It seems odd that Christ would be portrayed as a serpent – as the Devil! How can that be? Here is the answer:

Genesis 3:14-15 The LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. (15) I will

put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel. Which means – *Christ shall mortally wound the Serpent, and in a way that involves the Serpent injuring Christ.* Namely, at the cross.

Galatians tells us that “cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree” and that Christ became that curse for us (see Galatians 3). Do you see it then? The saving work of Christ on the Cross is portrayed back in the Old Testament as a serpent on a pole *because at the Cross Christ became cursed for us.* Satan “bruised” His heel by inciting Christ’s enemies to crucify Him, but it was not a fatal injury – *He rose from the dead. Satan on the other hand was defeated – bruised on the head.*

The symbol of the bronze serpent on the pole is a symbol of Christ becoming cursed by God for us and in that very same death at Calvary, putting to death the power and works of the devil – the serpent.

On the Cross, the sins of all who put their trust in Christ as their Savior, are reckoned or imputed (credited) to Christ – He is cursed for OUR sins

(see Isaiah 53:6ff). And HIS perfect and sinless life is credited to US so that the Law’s demands on us are fulfilled perfectly. We stand justified before God in a perfect righteousness, by faith alone in Christ alone.

Now, let’s end with some final words about the business of “looking” to live.

What is “faith”? What is it to believe in Christ? It is simply, TO LOOK. To repent is to stop looking at yourself or at some other supposed means of being made right with God, and LOOK at Jesus Christ on the cross.

Isn’t it incredible? I think it would be a fair conclusion to assume that there could well have been numbers of those perishing, bitten Israelites who *died rather than look at the bronze serpent on the pole.* There they were right in the middle of Christ’s covenant people, with God’s free and gracious means of healing and salvation set right in front of them, but they refused to look.

I have no doubt that there are many, many people today who claim to be Christians - perhaps one or more of you are just such a person – and yet they have never looked to Christ. Not because they CANNOT, but because they WILL NOT. We must not use some perversion of our Calvinistic doctrines of election and

predestination and total depravity as some excuse. “Well, you know, how can God expect me to look to Christ in faith when I have no ability to do so?” Paul pronounces such an excuse to be a lie (see Romans 9).

No, all you need to do is LOOK. You CAN look at Christ on the cross. You CAN turn away from whatever it is you are trusting in –

- Self-righteousness
- Christian heritage (parents Christian, raised in church, etc)
- Supposed moral life

You CAN look away from those things and LOOK at the bronze serpent and live. If you do not, it is because you choose not to.

“Jack, look to the serpent on the pole! You will be healed! You are dying! Look!”

“No,” says Jack as he keeps looking down at the ground, his arms swelling and turning blacker and blacker. “No,” I don’t need to. How is some stupid bronze snake on a pole going to heal me anyway? Leaven me alone.”

Jack will end in death, he will end in Hell, because he would not look.

And then a final word of encouragement for the Christian.

Sometimes we see how small our faith is, and we wonder how God could possibly be pleased with us. Well, at such times, remember this –

Faith is simply looking at Christ – looking at His perfect obedience to the Law of God for us, and His becoming a curse on the Cross in our place. Just a look. That’s all. Looking to Him and living.

This is the very thing that the Lord finally impressed upon the young C.H. Spurgeon as he had been miserable for so long under the weight of his sin. Here is the passage in the King James as Spurgeon would have heard it --

Isaiah 45:22 Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.
--

LOOK! That’s all. That is faith. And that is really good news. Look to Christ and live. Look and be free.