

Look and Live

SS/HN 16/05/04 am

Reading: Numbers 21, John 3:1-21

Study: John 3:11-15

Psalms: 103:1-5, 103:6-12, 61:1-4, 61:5-8

Which way do you look when you cross the road? Children used to be taught look to the right, to the left and right again. Nowadays there is often a painted sign on the road telling you to look right – unless it's a one way street. It is important to look in the right direction. I know of people being killed, in the USA for instance, because they looked the wrong way and failed to see the oncoming car.

The children of Israel in the wilderness were told to look- to look up to the bronze snake – and live. Jesus referred Nicodemus to this story from the Scriptures as he continued to witness to him about the Kingdom of God.

The Kingdom of God is a spiritual kingdom, a kingdom we do not see with our natural eyes but a very real kingdom nevertheless. You must be born again to enter this kingdom said Jesus. You must be born from above, born of the Spirit. God the HS moves like the wind, secretly but powerfully to change human hearts – to effect this new creation in Christ Jesus.

The Scripture testifies of this work of the Spirit of God. Jesus told Nicodemus, educated man and teacher that he was, that he should have understood this. Further, Jesus told him that he himself had come down from heaven to witness of the same truth. Jesus and only Jesus can bear such witness for no one else has ever come from heaven to earth.

Jesus refers to himself by the title **Son of man** in these verses and throughout his ministry. This title was rarely used by others (except Stephen in Acts 7). In the vision of Daniel (Daniel 7:13) we read of *One like the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven*. This One was given a kingdom, a kingdom that will not pass away. Jesus adopted this title that both hid and revealed his person and his work – the Messiah. For those with eyes to see they could understand this great revelation from God but for others this title revealed nothing to them. Son of Man of course emphasises that he took on humanity, that he came from heaven be man's representative.

Nicodemus was learning fast. His whole way of thinking as a Pharisee was being overturned. *You must be born again*, said Jesus. Nicodemus marveled at this teaching. *How can these things be*, he said. He probably wanted to say 'but what about keeping the law, what about all my good works'. But Jesus did not let him go down that track. What must he do? What must man do to be saved?

Jesus took him to the Scriptures for it is all there in the word of God for those with eyes to see. He took him to the story of Moses and Israel in the wilderness. To the time when they spoke against God and against Moses (Numbers 21). It is a story of grace not of works. A story of God's provision of life for those who looked to the sign that He provided. That sign of the lifted up serpent/snake is a type, something that pointed to the lifted up Son of Man. Let us look at some

aspects of this story in Numbers 21.

Lost and dying

The people of God had been delivered out of Egypt and were on their way to Canaan. But they became impatient and began to grumble against God. They complained about the food that God provided. God sent fiery serpents/poisonous snakes into their camp to punish them. Many were bitten and died.

What a horrific time it must have been. Their camp was like a snake pit. Have you ever had dreams of being surrounded by snakes? Of having snakes all through your house – under the bed, in the bed, in the shower, in the kitchen. As a child I used to have such dreams and once I remember pulling my bed away from the wall so the snakes would not be able to climb up and bite me. It was like a taste of Hell itself. Poisonous snakes everywhere, their bite causing a slow and painful death.

The people came to Moses acknowledging their sin and rebellion against the Lord. They urged him to pray for them, to pray that the Lord would take away the snakes that he would deliver them from this judgment. They we lost and dying. They cried out for forgiveness and salvation.

Lifted up

What Moses did must have seemed strange to them. The snakes did not go away but they were protected, they were saved from their venom. How were they saved? Moses set a bronze snake up on a pole as God told him. And the people were to look to this thing. It was only a thing, it had no power in itself – see later in the time of Hezekiah it was destroyed because the people started to worship this thing (2 Kings 18:4). It was in looking that they were saved by the grace and power of God.

Jesus saw this lifted up serpent as a type of his own being lifted up – *even so must the Son of man be lifted up*. What did Jesus mean? Certainly his being lifted up has much more intrinsic meaning than the snake in the desert but it is the power to save those who look to him in which he draws the parallel.

The word 'lifted up' is the same as that for 'exalted'. It can have this figurative meaning as well as the literal. For this reason Calvin and some others say that Jesus is referring to his exaltation in the preaching of the gospel. But it is more likely that Jesus was referring to the cross, to his literally be lifted up – which of course was an exaltation also. His death was a victory when we take together his crucifixion, resurrection and ascension. *He was delivered up for our sins and was raised to life for our justification* (Romans 4:25).

Nicodemus would have been struggling to comprehend what Jesus was talking about – the Son of Man must be lifted up. Even his disciples did not understand until after his death on the Cross. His death was according to the plan of God and there was a whole rationale behind his death. Why did Jesus die – why die he die on a cross. He was taking the punishment for your sin and mine, he became a curse for us – *cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree* (Gal 3:13). He died in our place – he became sin for us. So the snake being lifted up was as sign that was fulfilled, more than fulfilled, in the Cross, in the Son of man being lifted up on Calvary.

Look/believe

The lesson that Jesus was bringing before Nicodemus and the lesson that he brings before us today is that of believing. What were the people told to do with regard to the bronze snake? Were they to go and touch it or offer sacrifices to it. Were they to walk around it a hundred times in order to be saved? No! They were simply to look. *Everyone who is bitten when he looks at it shall live.* How simple. How easy. But how effective. When anyone who was bitten looked, he lived.

Nothing more, and nothing less. This was the only way they could be saved from death in the camp of Moses. Were there some who said 'how ridiculous'. 'How can simply looking at a bronze snake save me'? Were there those who said 'there must be something more? I must burn incense before it'.

Jesus was crucified some 2000 years ago. How can that be relevant to modern man so say? Surely in this day and age we do not think that looking to a man dying on a cross way back in history will be able to save us from death. *But we preach Christ crucified*, said Paul – *a stumbling block to the Jews* for they thought they must do good works, they must keep the law – *and to the Greeks foolishness* – something abhorrent to their educated minds (1Corinthians 1:23). But to those who are called *Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God*.

What a great and powerful gospel we preach when we preach Christ crucified. When they looked to the bronze snake they were saved. When we look to the Cross and believe, believe in Jesus, we are saved from death – we have eternal life. This is the parallel Jesus was drawing attention to. They were to look and they lived. We are to believe and to live – not just in this world but eternally.

Eternal life means literally 'life of the ages to come'. It is everlasting life but it is more than just length of life it is also quality of life, it is life in the presence of God. *This is eternal life to know...the only true God and Jesus Christ* (John 17:3). Note that those who believe, *whoever believes*, they **have** eternal life. They have it now. It is life as a child of God, a life of rich blessing and a glorious hope in Christ Jesus.

What must I do to be saved? *Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved* (Acts 16:31). *If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved* (Romans 10:9). Do you believe? Do you confess Him with your mouth?

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