

The Gospel of John

The Lifted up Christ

John 3:9-15

INTRODUCTION

Verses 1- 21 of John chapter 3 is a **dialog** between Jesus and Nicodemus. Last week we looked at the first 8 verses. Nicodemus had come to Jesus in the night to talk to Him. Nicodemus told Jesus that he knew He was favored by God because of the signs that He was performing. Signs that could only come from God.

Then Jesus, Who knows the heart of men, answered Nicodemus's unstated question. **"How do I get to Heaven?"**.

And Jesus told him that he must be BORN AGAIN!

This is a spiritual birth that happens when you believe in Christ and follow His commands. We are spiritually reborn when the Holy Spirit indwells within us.

But all of this only confused Nicodemus. He is probably thinking to himself: "what is going on here?"

Then the dialog continues when he asks Jesus another question.

All Stand and Read Scripture

John 3:9-15 (NASB)

⁹ Nicodemus said to Him, "How can these things be?" ¹⁰ Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things? ¹¹ Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know and testify of what we have seen, and you do not accept our testimony. ¹² If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man. ¹⁴ As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; ¹⁵ so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life.

Prayer

Nicodemus asks Jesus **"How can these things be?"**. Jesus pretty much lays into him and in a nutshell says, "Listen Nicodemus you are Israel's teacher, you are a scholar, an educated man and a big shot among the Jews. You have been teaching all these years in the synagogue, and you don't get this?"

I. THE LIFTED UP CHRIST

Paul tells how many people struggled with the teaching and preaching of Christ.

1 Corinthians 1:23 (NASB)

23 but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness,

This passage today in the early part of Jesus' ministry, may have been the beginning of that attitude of Jews in regard to Jesus. Living with him, questioning him, arguing with him... that was one thing. But to be told that the long awaited Jewish Messiah would be a born in a barn and raised by a carpenter, would have a servant's life and die young, and that at the hands of the enemy, was too much to swallow. Now, to add insult to injury, if you are one of the proud people eagerly awaiting your big day, and you hear that you can only be saved by believing in that Messiah who will be lifted up to die on a cross with common criminals, this would be a test of whatever faith you have.

The meeting of Nicodemus and Jesus resulted in a conversation that impacts us today. But Nicodemus has trouble understanding the dialog. He remarks, "**How can this be?**" Jesus is disappointed, but probably only in the fact that the Jewish religion has gone so far in the wrong direction. Jesus surely has reason to believe that a Teacher of Israel SHOULD know about these things.

So Jesus becomes more helpful. He knows if He mentions the Scriptures, Nicodemus will know exactly where they were going. They would then be on the same path, heading in the same direction.

In His last hope of success, Jesus says, "**Even as Moses...**" "Ah, interrupts the Ruler, "now you're speaking my language." Jesus continues, "**lifted up the snake in the desert.**" "Right," says, Nicodemus, "That's Num. 21. This is part of my ancestors' troublesome trip from slavery in Egypt to freedom in their promised land."

While this story was very familiar to Nicodemus, it may not be so familiar to us. So let us review.

The Israelites were slaves in Egypt. God brought up Moses to deliver them out of Egypt. Moses came before pharaoh and asked him several times "Let my people Go". But despite plague after plague, pharaoh would not let them leave. Finally, the final tenth plague came that killed all of the firstborn of the Egyptians where Pharaoh himself even lost his oldest son. He had finally had enough, so he finally told Moses that he and the Israelites could go. But as you know, a short time after Moses left, Pharaoh began to change his mind, So he sent all his chariot men after the Israelites. When Moses saw the Egyptians coming upon them, they were trapped by the Red Sea. But God had Moses stretch his rod out over the sea. God parted the waters of the Red Sea and allowed the Israelites to cross over on dry land. Pharaoh's army thought they could too, so they entered into the Red Sea. But God caused the sea to collapse upon them and they all drowned.

That brings us to the story in Numbers about lifting up the snake in the desert.

Numbers 21:4-9 (NASB)

4 Then they set out from Mount Hor by the way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the people became impatient because of the journey. 5 The people spoke against God and 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 miserable food."

⁶The Lord sent fiery serpents among the people and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. ⁷So the people came to Moses and said, “We have sinned, because we have spoken against the Lord and you; intercede with the Lord, that He may remove the serpents from us.” And Moses interceded for the people. ⁸Then the Lord said to Moses, “Make a fiery *serpent*, and set it on a standard; and it shall come about, that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, he will live.” ⁹And Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on the standard; and it came about, that if a serpent bit any man, when he looked to the bronze serpent, he lived.

The Israelites grew impatient along the way and they began to speak against God and against Moses, by saying, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!” Then the LORD sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died. The people came to Moses and said, “We sinned when we spoke against the LORD and against you. Pray that the LORD will take the snakes away from us.” So Moses prayed for the people. The LORD said to Moses, “Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live.” So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, he lived.

The answer for the snake bitten people in the first case was a brass snake lifted up on a pole in sight of all. This is a foreshadowing that we see often in the Old Testament.

The answer to all sin-bitten people today is the Son of Man lifted up for all to see.

II. THE POISON OF SIN.

The ONLY chance of reversing the deadly venomous bite was to look at the uplifted snake. Can you imagine what some might have said? “This is crazy! “Do you think we are mentally deficient? Do you expect us to believe that a look will mean life?”

Immediately we clue in to the fact that what is involved here is believing or having faith. This illustration called up from the Old Testament writings was designed for a purpose, the same purpose Jesus has already spoken of when he said,

John 3:12 (NASB)

¹²If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?

Nicodemus needed to become a believer in Jesus, in the fullest sense, if he is to experience new birth from above. The people in the camp of Moses would have to believe that someone greater than a fake snake had power to heal. Of course they did. They requested that Moses “pray to the Lord” for them. The Lord is the one who could give them their lives back.

Now it is the Ruler’s turn. Jesus uses foreshadowing, **the “just as...so”**, technique to drive home this point. As it was with the case of Moses and the snake-bitten people, so it is with all those suffering from sin poisoning. It would be for their benefit that “the son of Man must be lifted up.” The promise of the next verse requires one to believe that “there was one who was willing to die in my stead, that a soul so unworthy might live.”

This concept of the “lifted up Jesus” is not limited to this place in Scripture or to this

person. John chapter 8 is a section filled with confused minds, some think one thing and some another. Jesus just wanted them to believe Him!

John 8:28-35 (NASB)

²⁸ So Jesus said, "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am *He*, and I do nothing on My own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me. ²⁹ And He who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him." ³⁰ As He spoke these things, many came to believe in Him.

³¹ So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, *then* you are truly disciples of Mine; ³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." ³³ They answered Him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, 'You will become free'?"

³⁴ Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. ³⁵ The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever.

A more telling verse is found in chapter 12. It will verify that Jesus is predicting his death which will be his glorification. Jesus says plainly,

John 12:32-34 (NASB)

³² And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will **draw** all men to Myself." ³³ But He was saying this to indicate the kind of death by which He was to die. ³⁴ The crowd then answered Him, "We have heard out of the Law that the Christ is to remain forever; and how can You say, 'The Son of Man must be lifted up'? Who is this Son of Man?"

III. THE MAGNETISM OF CHRIST.

Did you catch what John said.

John 12:32 (NASB)

³² And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will **draw** all men to Myself."

The Old Testament is full of scriptures that describe Who and what the Messiah would be. But the Jews just did not understand that the Messiah would be a suffering servant. They thought He would be a King on earth shrouded in majesty.

Jesus is telling Nicodemus that when I am lifted up on the cross, that will cause men to believe that He is the prophesied Messiah.

Isaiah has pointed out that the Messiah would have no beauty or majesty to attract us to Him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire Him."

Isaiah 53:1-6 (NASB)

⁵³ Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? ² For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, And like a root out of parched ground; He has no *stately* form or majesty That we should look upon Him, Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him. ³ He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

⁴ Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted. ⁵ But He was pierced through for

our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. ⁶ All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him.

This informs us that the “attraction” we are advocating comes in other forms.

This is more than a declaration that a killing was going to take place. It went beyond saying that after he was dead, Jesus would be a drawing attraction. This “lifted up” Christ will be a magnet by virtue of the fact that this type of execution was reserved for criminals and was not the normal way for Jewish people to punish offenders. In his death on the cross, Jesus was identifying with people who have broken the law and need divine help. As Mark 15:28 says, “He was numbered with the transgressors”. Those who have come to realize the power of the gospel to save us from sin, find it easier to see the significance of this cruel punishment used on our Lord. He had come from heaven to be among us. It was his purpose to identify, in the fullest way possible, with sinful mankind. In spite of the fact that Jesus never committed even one sin of any kind, he was counted with sinners so that we could go free. What better way to imprint this on our hearts than the Roman crucifixion?

The magnetism is seen in another way. For all of us who seek salvation, it becomes clear that Jesus took the punishment that we deserved.. The cross says, “Someone must pay for you disobedience. I have chosen to blame it on my Son! You now have the opportunity to go free. Do you believe?” Object lessons always go further than mere words. This is one lesson we won’t soon forget.

It is also a lesson not too late for the learning.

1 Peter 2:21-24 NASB)

²¹ For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, ²² WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; ²³ and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting *Himself* to Him who judges righteously; ²⁴ and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.

This, in part, is the profound beauty of the cross that is so attractive to those seeking forgiveness.

ILLUSTRATION:

If someone would give me a dish of sand and tell me there were particles of iron in it, I might look for them with my eyes and search for them with my fingers and be unable to detect them. But if I were to take a magnet and sweep through it, now would it draw to itself the almost invisible particles by the mere power of attraction.

The unthankful heart, like my finger in the sand, will not discover any mercies. But if you have a thankful heart and sweep it through the day you will find that as the magnet finds the iron, so you will find, in every hour, some heavenly blessings from God.

“But I was not there,” you say, “I didn’t have opportunity to live when Jesus was lifted up.” No worry. To people who had never set foot in Jerusalem and had never seen Jesus

with their eyes, Paul wrote,

When the good news is preached to us we “see” with the “eyes of our heart.”

Ephesians 1:18-20 (NASB)

¹⁸ *I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,*
¹⁹ *and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might* ²⁰ *which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places,*

CONCLUSION:

When you look to Jesus - when you believe and in your mind's eye look to Jesus on the cross - the devil's poison in you is taken away - the devil's work in you is destroyed. You have to believe and you have to obey.

What do you have to believe? This is not about the degree of faith, (strong, weak, lukewarm) but in the nature of belief itself. You must believe that “He paid a debt He did not owe, I owed a debt I could not pay, I needed someone to wash my sins away.” This is faith in Jesus our Sin Offering.

How do we obey? Keep in mind that our text is written to describe a time before the cross took place. These were the days of John the Baptist, who “came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins”. We learn later that “John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.

Since we live after the cross we obey what Jesus said after he was crucified.

Mark 16:15-16 (NASB)

¹⁵ *And He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.* ¹⁶ *He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned.*

Our obedience will include repenting of sins (the sins we committed as well as the sins resulting from things we failed to do), being immersed into Christ our Sin Offering, and committing to a life of following Jesus.

This is the way to have the promised “eternal life.”

The Family of God.