

Look and Live

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[0 : 00] And we can pick up a reading from verse 14, John 3, verse 14.

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, and that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

Now I'm sure most, if not all of us gathered here tonight, are more than familiar with the words of John 3, verse 16.

These are perhaps the words of the most famous verse in all of Scripture, words that we have known from our childhood.

[1 : 08] But it's not these words that I'd like us to focus on tonight, as important as they are.

Because verses 14 and 15 in John chapter 3, the words that we find in these verses, they are also very much at the heart of God's plan of redemption.

And so Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, and as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whosoever believes in him may have eternal life.

And for us to be able to understand these words tonight, the words that Jesus spoke to Nicodemus, it'll be helpful for us to turn back to the book of Numbers, that we read earlier, Numbers chapter 21.

So if we could turn back to that together just now. If you could have your Bibles open at this chapter, Numbers 21, and especially verses 4 to 9.

And what I'd like us to do is to look at the words from verses 4 to 9 this evening under three headings. First of all, I'd like us to look at the ungrateful people that are spoken of in these verses.

[2 : 33] Then I'd like us to look at the punishment that these people brought upon themselves. And then finally, the provision that was made for these people.

The people, the punishment, and the provision. Firstly then, let's look at the people. And we read from verse 4 in this chapter, From Mount Hor, they set out by the way of the Red Sea to go around Edom, the land of Edom.

Now the people who are referred to here are none other than the children of Israel. And at this point in their history, we find them towards the end of their wanderings in the wilderness as they make their way to that promised land of Canaan under the leadership of Moses.

Here we read that they're travelling from Mount Hor near the Red Sea to the borders of Edom.

They're unable to go through Edom, so what they need to do is to go round Edom and take the longer route.

Now this would have been some of the most inhospitable terrain in the world. A terrain that would have been unforgiving and difficult to walk.

[3 : 59] Yet as the children of Israel find themselves making this journey, they have so much to be thankful for. We read at the beginning of the chapter that they had just enjoyed their first ever victory against the Canaanites following an answer to their prayer to the Lord for help.

He had heard their prayer, he had answered them, he had protected them and delivered them from the hands of the Canaanites. And so looking from the outside, you would say that these children of Israel, as they made their way to the promised land, they had much to look forward to.

They had victory behind them and they had that promised land in front of them. But yet there's an old saying that goes, old habits die hard.

And so it was with the children of Israel. Because following this victory, as soon as the going got tough, as soon as they realized that the way was going to be difficult for them, what do we read that they did?

Well, and through the children of Israel's style, they did what they had done so many times in the past. They began to moan, to complain, and to grumble.

[5 : 32] We read in the middle of verse 4, that the people became impatient on the way, that the people spoke against God and against Moses.

Why have you brought us up out of the land of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food.

There is no doubt that, yes, it was a hard slog for them as they went through the wilderness. No doubt they had become tired of eating the same food, the same manna, day after day after day. But even although this was just a temporary arrangement, they were somehow unable to see past their immediate circumstances.

They were unable to see the bigger picture. They were unable to see that they were, in fact, on their way to a better place. Isn't this so like us as human beings by nature?

[6 : 42] I think it's fair to say that we're all more than happy to enjoy every good thing that we get daily from God, our health and our strength, our family, our job, our home, our car, all our material possessions.

We're happy to take all these things from the Lord. But so often, we forget to give thanks. So often, we forget to say thank you to the one who is indeed the giver of every good and perfect gift.

And yet, as soon as difficulties arise in our life, in our experience, is it not true that sometimes we will say to ourselves in our heart, why me?

Friends, life is hard. There's no doubt about that. And often we feel, if you pardon the expression, often we feel that we are wading through treacle.

[7 : 54] We're trudging through life. we're finding it difficult even to face the next day. But yet the blessing or the relief, it doesn't come in us turning our backs to God or coming before the Lord with a critical spirit.

The blessing comes when we, as we read in Scripture, as we read in Isaiah, the blessing comes when we put on the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.

You know, we see that in Acts chapter 16 with Paul and Silas. they had every reason to complain after having been stripped and beaten and cast into prison and tied up in stocks.

What do we find them doing? Do we find them complaining to the Lord as to the bitter cup of providence that they have to drink from? No.

We see that they sing the praises of the Lord. They come and they rejoice in their providence.

[9 : 20] They rejoice in the knowledge that their God reigns, that they are but part of a bigger picture. And as soon as they begin praising the Lord, what happens?

There's immediately an earthquake and they are released from their stocks. They are made free.

Friends, we too should pray that we would have this spirit, that we would have just as much of a spirit of praise and worship in the day of adversity as we do in the day of prosperity.

We don't read, however, of the children of Israel singing as they walked. Instead, they are consumed by this bitterness, this ungrateful spirit that leaves them so far from being free in the will of God.

It's only when we're in the will of God that we truly experience that freedom. When we fight against it, we find that we're in bondage.

Time and time again, we read in Scripture of the ungrateful attitude of the children of Israel. I think there are around about 14 accounts of them grumbling before either Moses or the Lord.

[10 : 49] But you know, there comes a time when enough is enough. It's true to say that our Lord is long-suffering.

But friends, he isn't all-suffering. And for the children of Israel, it's as if he said, no more. I have blessed you time and time again.

And what do you do in response? You turn your back on me. You look to yourselves. We read in verse 6 that the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people and that they bit the people so that many of the people of Israel died.

This brings us to our second point, the punishment of the people. In response to all their ungrateful complaining, in response to the attitude of their heart, the Lord finally punishes this people.

He sends these deadly, fiery serpents in their midst. Now, they get their name, the fiery serpent, not because of their color, not because they were red, but rather because once they would bite their victims, their victims would be left with a fiery inflammation that would send the venom right through their body, leaving them to die.

[12 : 34] This was a just reward for a people who had taken their eye of the Lord. This was a just reward for a people who had ceased to be thankful for all that they so abundantly had.

This was a just reward for a people who had sought to turn their back on the one who had brought them safely thus far.

But you know, friends, there's nothing new under the sun because nowhere do we see the consequences of ingratitude and disobedience more than in the Garden of Eden.

You'll remember that Adam and Eve had been given a whole garden to enjoy, so many good things to eat. Yet isn't it strange that the very tree that they were asked or told or commanded even not to eat of, that that was the very tree that they took the fruit from.

They weren't satisfied with what they had. They wanted more. And in eating this fruit, in carrying on regardless, they would lead humanity to the most catastrophic of consequences because like the children of Israel, their actions led them to be bitterly bitten by that serpent.

[14 : 18] They were stung by Satan when they chose to listen to his voice rather than the voice of the Lord. A sting that has been felt even this night by you and by myself.

We all have that in common. We all have the deadly venom of sin coursing through our veins.

We all have that poison infecting our hearts and our minds, informing our words and our actions. sins. None of us are immune and left to ourselves. None of us are free from the curse that follows this poison.

sin. Like the deadly bite of the serpents in the wilderness, if our sin is left undealt with tonight, it's true to say that it will cause us untold misery and pain in hell itself for all eternity.

[15 : 31] Friends, isn't that solemn? You might be sitting here tonight and you might have put that thought to the back of your mind.

You might even think that it is a figment of the imaginations of Christians, but let me tell you, as sure as you are sitting here tonight, as sure as the venom of sin is coursing through your very being, so too lies a punishment for each and every one of us, if that deadly disease is not cured.

The children of Israel soon came to realize their fate. They soon came to feel the effects of the bites taking hold of their bodies.

For some, the solemn reality is that it was too late. We read at the end of verse 6 that many people died. Those who remained, they knew that their time was short, and so what they did was they came to Moses crying out in desperation.

We read, we have sinned against the Lord and against you. Pray to the Lord that he may take away the serpents from us. And isn't that so often what happens to us when we come to know the Lord as our own personal saviour?

[17 : 13] We're brought to that place where we see the vileness of our own hearts. We are convicted of our sin and we're brought to that place where all we can do is come to the Lord in repentance.

I wonder is that you tonight? Have you come to the Lord in repentance?

Are you aware if you're being truly honest with yourself? Are you aware of the very fact that you are infected by that deadly poison of sin and that you really do need to be saved?

And so when Moses prayed that prayer for the people the Lord answered. In the same way that he'd answered their prayers before when they had prayed that he would deliver them from the hands of the Canaanites the Lord once again he answered their prayers.

here we see that there was the greatest of provisions which brings us to our third and final point.

[18 : 36] We read in verses 8 and 9 10 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.

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 he would live. Now humanly speaking you would think that the bite of a serpent the cure for the bite of a serpent would be found in the hands of a doctor or of a physician. Or perhaps in the context here you would have expected the people to have brewed lotions and potions and to have applied these to the wound in order to help it heal.

Or perhaps you might have expected those who were able to come together and to try and collectively exterminate these deadly serpents.

But that's not what we read here. Because when Moses comes before the Lord in prayer the Lord doesn't reply by asking that these people help themselves through some path of self-reformation.

[19 : 59] You see they were to cease from human remedies and they were to turn to divine remedies. They were to realize the fact that they couldn't save themselves.

No matter what they tried to do they were dying. And you know I believe tonight there is such a stark lesson for us here.

It may be that you are a moral upright member of the town of Stornoway or wherever it is you live. It might be that you are highly respected.

You're a good neighbor. You help by doing charitable works. You are liked or even loved by many. You may be satisfied with yourself because you make an effort and you come to the Lord's house every Sunday.

You come and you have a desire to be with the Lord's people. And it's good that you do come. It's good that you are a good neighbor. All these things are to be commended in and of themselves.

[21 : 17] You know friends the problem comes when you and when I, when we begin to depend upon these things when we start using these things as some kind of ointment that we can apply to the wounds of our sin.

Thinking that if we are a good person that we will not be seen as a sinner before a holy God.

Friends, it may be that you are outwardly seen as a good person but underneath the ointment of your own good works there lies a deeper problem.

You see underneath the surface there lies a root problem and that is the heart problem of sin that no matter what you try to do it cannot be rid of.

Friends, there is no human remedy for sin. If there was, no doubt you and no doubt I, we would take the glory to ourselves.

Look what I did. What a wonderful person I am. I have reformed my own life. No, it's God and God alone who deserves all the glory and it's him and him alone that provides that remedy for sin.

[22 : 55] And you know it was the same with the children of Israel. They couldn't heal themselves. God asks Moses to make a fiery serpent, to set it on a pole and that everyone who is bitten when he sees it, they shall live.

Now you could understand if this bronze serpent was held up as a reminder to the people that there were serpents that they could be bitten by.

But I don't think they needed reminding of this. And that's not what we read here in the passage.

The Lord says to Moses that everyone who sees that bronze serpent shall live.

As simple as that, all they needed to do was to look. Now at this point you may be forgiven for thinking that this was the most ridiculous request.

We know that there are no such healing properties in a bronze serpent. And perhaps even the children of Israel, they would have thought that this was a strange remedy for their dying state.

[24 : 18] Yet this was their opportunity. This was their second and third and fourth and fifteenth chance, whatever it was, this was their chance to show the Lord that they could take him at his word.

No matter how ludicrous it may have sounded to them in desperation, they had no choice. They had nothing to lose, friends, and absolutely everything to gain.

And you know, like so much in the Old Testament, what we have before us here in the bronze serpent, it cannot really and truly be understood unless we place it on the timeline of redemptive history, unless we look at it through the glasses, if you like, of the New Testament, and especially of the words of the text that we read in John 3, 14 and 15.

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

The provision of the bronze serpent was of course a foreshadowing of the provision that is in Christ for the sinner tonight.

[25 : 52] He makes it clear in this verse that there is a direct link between this bronze serpent and the Son of Man, the Lord Jesus Christ. And if we look closely, we're able to see what draws the two together.

Firstly, we notice that it wasn't interestingly a golden serpent that the Lord asked Moses to lift up, but a bronze serpent, or in the Hebrew, the original term could even be translated as copper. copper. This was a serpent that wasn't of any real monetary value. There was nothing startling about it for the children of Israel to be attracted to it.

There was nothing that would take their gaze to this serpent. And you know, isn't this so similar to Christ? We read in the prophecy of Isaiah when he speaks of Christ, he says that he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, no beauty that we should desire him. He wasn't a prince, humanly speaking, or a king. In fact, we read in scripture that he was despised, he was rejected by men.

[27 : 22] Humanly speaking, like this bronze serpent, there was nothing about this man that would attract. Another interesting thing to note is the fact that the very thing that was used to reverse the curse of the bite of the serpent was indeed another serpent.

Again, this is such a clear picture of Christ because it's true to say that it was through man that the curse of sin came into the world.

It was through Adam. man that the curse of sin could be cured, if you like, could be reversed, the curse of death.

We see some scriptural references to make this clear for us in Romans 8. 3. We read, 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.

And also in Galatians 3.13, Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. And so, in the same way that there was a provision made in the bronze serpent for the curse of the serpent bite, tonight there is a provision made in the Son of Man for the curse of sin.

[29 : 13] He took that curse upon himself. He took upon himself the likeness of sinful flesh, so that you don't have to die, but so that you can enjoy life eternal.

Perhaps the greatest connection between the bronze serpent and our Lord can be found in our text, and as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

Both the bronze serpent and the Son of Man were lifted up. in order for the Israelites to live, this serpent had to be lifted up on a pole for all to see, and in order for sinners such as you and such as I for us to live, the Son of Man had to be lifted up on that cross, so that we could look upon him with that believing glance.

He had to be lifted up on that cross on Calvary's hill. He had to be lifted up by those evil men who nailed him and left him hanging, who left him for dead.

Why? Well, we go back to that famous verse that we read at the beginning. Why? So that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

[31 : 08] Whosoever. Are you part of that whosoever? And if you are not part of that whosoever, why are you not part of that whosoever?

Here, friends, here is a remedy to that poison of sin that is day by day bringing you ever closer to a lost eternity.

What a provision we find in Christ though. He died so that we may live. Now, to the outward eye, this act of being lifted up on a cross, this act of being crucified before all these people, it was the height of humiliation and degradation.

But aren't we glad that he was lifted up? And in this exaltation, in this lifting up, not only on the cross, but in his resurrection and in his ascension, we see that the attributes of God, they shine forth so abundantly in Christ, his love, his mercy, his goodness, his grace, his grace that led him to say in John 12, and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men or people to myself. We read in our text in John, the Son of Man must be lifted up. There was no other way.

[33 : 04] There is no other way. This is the only provision for you tonight if you find yourself dying spiritually.

This is a provision that has removed that sting out of death. death, oh death, oh grave, where is thy victory?

Oh death, where is thy sting? You can truly say tonight, if you have looked to Christ as he has given himself on that cross, the children of Israel had two options.

They could either have looked at this bronze serpent and lived, or they could have turned their back on it and died. Surely not a difficult choice.

Yet perhaps there were those in the camp who thought that they didn't need to look at the bronze serpent straight away, that because they couldn't yet see the effects of this deadly bite taking place on their bodies, that they had some more time, how wrong they were.

[34 : 25] Friends, tonight, you have a choice. You have the choice tonight of either turning your back on Christ, you have the choice of carrying on through life day after day, burying your head in the sand, pretending that all is well with your soul, putting off the day of salvation.

Well, friends, I think we are so starkly reminded that tomorrow is not promised any of us. You can postpone the day of salvation, salvation, you can turn your back on the risen saviour, but friends, in doing so, the solemn reality is that you will die.

You will experience that eternal death. You will experience that torment and misery that is so little spoken of, that torment and misery that is found in the deepest, darkest depths of hell.

Or, you can turn to Christ. Tonight, provision has been made for your soul in him.

Won't you believe? Won't you come to an end of yourself and realize that without Christ, you have nothing?

[36 : 19] It doesn't matter how many times you have been bitten by the serpent of sin. It doesn't matter how much of this venom you feel is in your system.

You might feel that you are the biggest sinner of all. It doesn't matter how much you have broken God's law. Because friends, tonight, if you look that look of faith to the crucified, risen, ascended Christ, you have a glorious provision made for you.

A provision that you can begin enjoying today. a provision that will take you to that promised land. A provision that will take you at last to be with the one who was lifted up, the one who died so that you could live.

Let it be so. Let it be so that this night when you leave this place. You do not sleep until you pray that prayer, Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner.

[37 : 42] Because as we saw tonight, he hears and he answers prayer. Amen. We pray that the Lord would bless these few thoughts to us, that he would have all the praise and glory.

Amen. we can conclude by singing from Psalm 121 in the Scottish Psalter.

Psalm 121, that's on page 416. Psalm 121, I to the hills will lift mine eyes from whence doth come mine aid.

My safety cometh from the Lord, who heaven and earth hath made. We can sing the whole psalm to the tune bays of haras. I to the hills will lift mine eyes.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[39 : 15] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Ab Stadt ■■■■ move ■■■■e sponsorship. j adeo ■■■■ tet impossible, He's somber, God, he keeps.

Behold thee, God, he tits triumph. He's somber, God, not cease.

The Lord he keeps, the Lord thy shame. On thy right hand dost stay.

The moon by night, he shall not smite. Nor yet the sun by day.

[40 : 36] The Lord shall keep, my soul he shall. Reserved thee, God, all ill.

And for thy home we now can't end.

God, he forever shall. If you could give me a moment to meet you at the front door and Mr.

McKeever at the side door.

We'll conclude with a word of prayer. Lord our God, we pray that as we leave this place this night, that thy word would remain with us.

That it would dwell richly in our hearts. And that indeed it would bear fruit for the glory of God. Part us now with thy blessing.

[41 : 41] And we pray that all that has been said and done in this place would above all else be to the glory of God the Father. Amen.