

Everyone Who Looks Will Live: Nicodemus and the Bronze Serpent; John 3, Numbers 21
0456-0459

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What a wonderful blessing that music was. Thank you to all you folks, especially you folks who traveled to be here. Cause there's some faces among you that I've not seen before this week. So thank you so much for that. That was a tremendous blessing. Thank you so much. Uh, victory in Jesus is one of my favorites and ancient words.

I believe Michael W. Smith wrote that song. That's one of my favorites as well. So thank you for that. And thank you for all you guys. Just, I mean, to extend the invitation and to have me here and to have me back and then to come back, there are a lot of faces that I've seen every night this week and some other faces I've seen most every night.

And I just want to say thank you for, for coming back because. You know, it has been said of me that I do tend to go kind of long. I don't know who would have said such a crazy thing as that, but, nevertheless, thank you for coming back. And you know, what I'm really doing brother is I'm making you look good because at the end of the week, you know, at the end of the week, you know, you may hear some comments that say, you know, we had a.

We had a pretty good revival, but I'm glad I don't have to sit through that every, every Sunday. So, but no, all kidding aside, all kidding aside, thank you so much for coming back. And I just want to encourage you by saying this. First Peter chapter two, we read these words. So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and slander like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk.

So I've seen among a number, a lot of folks here this week, a true longing for the milk of the word. And there's only one way that you long for the word, and that's because it's a work of the spirit in you. So that's an encouragement. You should take that as a, as a genuine encouragement. You can certainly come and listen to the word.

Out of some other types of motives, maybe you want other people to see you come or maybe you feel like you're earning a place with in God's favor by doing that, but if you in your heart can honestly say that I long to hear the word proclaimed because it resonates in my soul, then that is evidence for you of the work of the spirit.

So thank you for that and thank you for having me again tonight. Grab your Bible. I want to invite you tonight to join me in two places. So you can go ahead and be finding these two places. The first of these will be John chapter 3. We will begin in John chapter 3 and then we'll go from there to Numbers chapter 21.

Most of you can probably find John 3 pretty easily. Numbers is maybe a little bit... Less familiar. It's the fourth book of your Bible. So just find Numbers 21, maybe stick a piece of paper there or a finger, bulletin, and then join me in John chapter 3. We're going to begin here looking at, and his name is Nicodemus.

And we're going to begin by looking at him. And as we begin here, I just want to sort of set the context by saying to us that we will be looking at two passages that are Among the most unique passages of the Scripture particularly the John 3 passage in John chapter 3 Jesus is going to have a Conversation with Nicodemus that as far as I can tell is the only conversation of its type in all the Scripture Jesus had lots of conversations with lots of different people He had conversations with his antagonists, his enemies, as they tried to attack his teachings and attack him personally, attack his disciples.

He had lots of conversations with them. Jesus had conversations with others in which he invited them to leave behind their sinful life and follow him. And those invitations were declined, such as the invitation to the one who said he would follow Jesus and just wait for, let me, let me go and bury my father and, or the one who said, I'll follow you.

And he says, well, I'm. Foxes have dens and holes in the ground and I don't have any of that. Or the rich young ruler who said, what must I do to inherit eternal life? And so these conversations that Jesus would often have with people, which he would invite them into the new life that he offered to them, were sometimes declined.

And those were rather short conversations. He had other conversations with people. We're in which he invited them to follow him and they could be rather short conversations as well even shorter In fact, he would say things like leave your nets and follow me and they would and that would be the extent of the conversation So he had lots of conversations with lots of different people But to my knowledge, she only had one conversation with one individual at least one that's recorded in our Scriptures In which he reasoned with a man who was being called by God to believe, and Jesus reasoned with him as to why he should believe and how he could believe.

This is, of course, the conversation that he has with Nicodemus. So we'll begin there. And then as we turn from there to Numbers 21, Numbers 21 is also a climactical passage for us. Numbers 21 is the climax, it's the high point of the whole book. That passage will be familiar to us when we go there as well.

Now as we begin, um, let's just remind ourselves of something that we all know very well and that's this, that we cannot possibly over emphasize the cross. We cannot talk about the cross of Jesus Christ too often, too deeply, too enthusiastically. We just simply cannot ponder the cross too much. And that's what we'll be doing tonight.

For the point of the message tonight is the same as the point was last night. Anybody remember the point from the message last night? Simply look to Jesus. Just look to Jesus. We have that same point tonight. Just simply look. to Jesus. So let's begin in John chapter three, just to set the context of John's chapter.

John chapter three, John begins his gospel back in creation or even prior to creation. And he, and he begins just by establishing that Christ, the son of God, the second person of the Trinity has always been and always existed in the beginning was the word. And the word was. was God and the Word was with God.

And this Word was there at creation. Creation was by Him, through Him, and for Him. And then this Word entered into creation. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. The God who

created all things entered into His creation as part of His creation. And by entering into His creation, the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

The Word began to issue forth an invitation to receive, to come, and to hear, and to believe, and to receive, and then we begin seeing a pattern, and the pattern is that this invitation, this call, that's a better word to use, this call was refused by most but answered by some. And the ones who refused it were oftentimes his own people.

Sometimes the one who answered it was his own people. The ones who... Refused it were sometimes not what would have been considered his own people. And oftentimes they were, or those who would answer it were also not considered his normal people or the people that he would come to, such as, for example, the two examples that come first in John's gospel, which would be Nicodemus to whom we'll look tonight, which would have been considered one of his own, a Jew, one of his own, a Pharisee.

And that, that call upon Nicodemus will be answered. And then after this comes the call to the Samaritan woman at the well, someone that would, who would have not been considered one of his own. And she hears and she comes, but then nevertheless, most who hear this call will refuse it because that's emphasized by John throughout chapter one.

Chapter 2, He came unto His own, and His own did not receive Him, but to those who did receive Him, He gave the power to be called children of God, or sons of God. So we see this theme being built, and the theme is that the call goes to all people, but it is refused by most, it is rejected by most, but it is received by some.

And then we find the first miracle of Jesus ministry. The first miracle was the turning of the water to wine at the wedding at Cana. Now, the wedding at Cana, the miracle that took place there, the turning the water to the wine is an illustration of what will follow after that, because the turning of the water to wine, the point of that miracle is the point of replacement, the point of displacing the old and replacing it not only with the new, but with the new that's far better than the old, the old water.

Is displaced and replaced by the wine that is far better than the water that was in there before, and that's to illustrate the means or the way in which these who would hear the call and believe the means by which they would do that. They would do that by hearing these words of Jesus and displacing in their heart their old ways of thinking of how one comes to know God.

Or how one comes to be a child of God, displacing that with this new information that Jesus is giving them. So we'll see this secondly, by the woman at the, at the well, she has her own ideas of how one comes to know God. She's got all these ideas about, she says, well, you're a prophet. So tell me which mountain are we supposed to be worshiping on this mountain or the one that we, we say, or the one that you say.

So she's got her own ideas. about how one comes to know God, those ideas have to be displaced. And Jesus displaces those ideas first by drawing attention to her sin. Go and get your, your husband and bring him here. Oh, you don't have a husband. Oh, okay. You've been living with five different men and so forth, so on and so forth.

So she has to have her ideas displaced by Jesus's confrontational words. Likewise, Nicodemus also has his understanding of how one knows God and Jesus has to do the same with him. He has to displace those old ideas. of how that are ingrained in Nicodemus as to how one is right with God. And he has to replace it with the teaching that we're going to look at tonight, the teaching that we'll all be very familiar with.

So with that context in mind, let's just begin here in chapter three, verse one of John's gospel. So beginning from verse one, now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. So this man, Nicodemus, Jesus was a high up type of man. He was a ruler. He was of the upper echelon, a ruler of the Jews were called.

Not only is he of the, the exclusionary sect of the Pharisees, but he also is a ruler of the Jews. We're going to be told a little bit later that he's the teacher of Israel. So he's, he's a high ranking, important sort of fellow. Verse two, this man came to Jesus by night. So as he comes to Jesus by night.

Sometimes it is thought, well, we're told that he comes to Jesus by night because he is maybe at the beginning point of listening and believing to Jesus. But he doesn't yet have the courage to come out in the day and be seen with Jesus in the day And so he comes by night by the stealth of night because he doesn't yet have that boldness in him to come by day So sometimes that is often pointed out other times other people would say well No, the reason he comes to Jesus by night is just because that's how things were done because Nicodemus is a busy guy He's a ruler of the he's the ruler of the Jews is the teacher of Israel And like a lot of people, he's busy with other responsibilities during the day.

And the night would have been the only time he had to come. We think of, for example, when Paul was in Corinth and Paul is teaching the Corinthians there in Corinth and, and we read that he was a tent maker by day and that he would teach at night. And so oftentimes that would be just like our, our lives today.

When there's something you've got responsibilities during the day, but then you, when there's something else to do, you do it at night. We don't know which it was it either way. It really it really doesn't make much of a difference I would just encourage all of us not to get too Attached to one way or thinking of the other because we're not told specifically why it was he came by night We just know he came to Jesus.

This man came to Jesus and he came by night And he said to him, rabbi, we know that you are a T you are a teacher. Come from God for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him. So that's a true statement. He makes this true statement. No one can do these signs unless God is with them.

And that's the point of all the signs that Jesus does. That's the point of his teaching. That's the point of his mighty works. We are told that the mighty works that Jesus performed as well as the mighty works that the apostles performed the purpose of all of these signs and wonders was to Affirm and to validate the message and the messenger.

That's the point of the miracles Hebrews chapter 2 We read these words. How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord and it was speaking of the

salvation. It was attested to us by those who heard while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit.

So he says, this salvation was proclaimed to you and it was attested by God. And the way that God attested it was through signs and wonders that validated the message or Acts chapter two and verse 22. Men of Israel hear these words. Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst.

So there, Peter says, he's preaching this, this sermon, and he says, you yourselves saw the mighty works. And what the mighty works did was a test to you, the validity, the genuineness of the man Jesus and the words that Jesus spoke, or for also, for example, Matthew 11, we think of Jesus's response to John, the baptizer, John the Baptizer sends this message to Jesus and says, ask him, is he really the one that we're waiting for?

And how does Jesus answer that? Well, you can know if I'm the one that you've been waiting for because of the signs, the blind see, the deaf hear, the lame walk, and so on and so forth. Or a second Corinthians 12 and Paul talks about the signs of the apostles. So the signs and wonders were meant to attest to the validity of the messenger and the message.

And so Jesus performs these signs and wonders and they attest to his message. They attest to his identity. And Nicodemus rightly recognizes that no one can do these signs and these wonders, unless they are sent of God. Now, there's going to be some other times in our Scriptures in which people come to Jesus and they say similar words to Jesus, but their, their purpose is going to be to flatter him.

They will come to Jesus and they'll say, Jesus teacher. We know that you don't give any stock to people's opinions, but you only listen to God. And they don't mean that to be a, an observation that they are recognizing that he's a, this true teacher. They're minting their meaning to butter him up, to flatter him.

Nicodemus doesn't have that motive. He's not coming to flatter Jesus. And we know that for two reasons. First, we know that because we know Nicodemus's story. We know that later on at the end of the gospel. He is going to be one of the two men who risks his position and his reputation to go and retrieve the dead body of Christ off the cross and bury it, thereby associating publicly with this man, Jesus, who was just condemned and executed for being a traitor to Rome.

So that's one way that we know that Nicodemus has genuineness in his request. But the other way that we really know this, this is more important. The other way is we see that in Jesus's response. Jesus's response is to essentially take Nicodemus by the hand, and as we said earlier, to begin to speak these words to him in effort to help him to come to this saving faith.

We see an example here of a man who is trying, what I believe, is his best to believe upon Jesus. Because God is working, God has... Jesus has worked in his heart and has drawn him to Jesus, and he's trying his human best to believe upon Jesus. Jesus encounters him and then engages him with this conversation to draw him further into this belief.

So picking up again in verse three, Jesus answered him. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. So that would have seemed like a, like an odd

answer. Jesus, Nicodemus says to Jesus, teacher, we know that you're sent from God for these mighty wonders and signs that you're doing.

And then Jesus says, Hey, nobody can enter the kingdom of God unless you're born again. That seems like. Well, you want to say, well, Jesus, why did you answer that with the two things don't even seem connected to one another. And I think that oftentimes Jesus, of course, he has a laser beam focus on what he wants to talk about.

And so he certainly could have taken the conversation there quickly. I think that the bigger thing to see here is, is John is not recording all of the sentences that were spoken. He, his, his point, his goal is not to record every single sentence in the dialogue between Nicodemus and Jesus. He wants to record the main central points.

So probably there was some more conversation between here and the, this whole conversation between. Jesus and Nicodemus probably took place, oh, I don't know, over 30, 45 minutes, an hour, two hours, but then in the course of the conversation, Jesus then turns to Nicodemus and says, you know, Nicodemus, you cannot enter the kingdom kingdom of God unless you are born again.

Now, the metaphor that Jesus will use with Nicodemus. We'll be lost on him. He won't understand this. He, he will not follow Jesus's train of thought, and he can be completely excused for this because this is the first time this metaphor has ever been used. The Old Testament never used the metaphor of new birth.

to speak of the life that God brings to his children. And in fact, this metaphor is only going to be used one more time by Peter. In 1 Peter 1, verse 23, Peter will say, Since you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable. So that's the only other occasion in which there is a clear reference in which the metaphor of new birth is used.

to describe the conversion of a sinner to be a child of God. There are a couple of other places where it's alluded to. For example, we think of, 2 Corinthians 5 and verse 17 when Paul says, If anyone's in Christ, he is a new creation or new creature. And that sort of alludes to a new birth. Or Romans 5, where Paul speaks of being buried with Christ in his baptism and raised to walk in newness of life.

That also alludes to a new birth. But outside of that, this and the words of Peter are the only times that your Bible speaks of conversion. As a new birth or being born again, so Nicodemus, we can certainly understand why he's going to struggle with this metaphor. But what the metaphor is saying to him, what Jesus's words are saying to him are essentially three things.

He's going to say, first of all, this new birth. is non optional. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. So this is non optional, Nicodemus. This is a required prerequisite. Secondly, Jesus is going to say that this new birth is a work. It's a matter of the spirit.

And ultimately this work of the spirit is beyond you. We'll see how Jesus is going to use these. Analogies to teach that to Nicodemus. And then thirdly, Jesus is going to help to show to Nicodemus what he means by this metaphor. By then connecting it to an event in the Old

Testament that we'll get to. So now verse four, Nicodemus said to him, how can a man be born when he is old?

You see how he's struggling here to understand Jesus? What? What are you saying? How can a man be born when he's old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born a ridiculous picture, but you see how Nicodemus is just trying to grasp. What Jesus is now communicating to him, verse five, Jesus answered, truly, truly.

I say to you, unless one is born of water in the spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. So, so Jesus says, unless you're born again, you can't see the kingdom of God. How can that be? Jesus, do you enter into your mother's womb a second time? And Jesus's answer is unless you're born again. You cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

Verse six, that which is born of the flesh is flesh, that which is born of the spirit is spirit. Verse seven, do not marvel that I said to you, you must be born again. And here comes this earthly analogy. The wind blows where it wishes. And you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes.

So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit. Now probably most of us have heard that in, actually in both the Greek and the Hebrew language is as well as the Latin language, which was the first language that the Scriptures were translated to outside of, of course, Greek and Hebrew and all three of those languages that the word for Spirit.

and wind and breath are all the same word. You may have heard that before. And so we have this play on words that's necessarily taking place. And the play on words is the, is the interchange between wind and spirit, which are the same word. So you can kind of see how. This is really connected together and how Nicodemus is still really scratch, scratching his head here.

The wind blows where it wishes. You hear it's sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the spirit. So Jesus's analogy is those who are born of the spirit are like the wind in the sense that You see the effect of the wind, and you hear the effect of the wind.

You can see when the trees move, and then you know that that means that the wind has hit them. You can hear the wind rustle through the leaves, and you know that's because the wind is blowing through it. But you don't see the cause of it. You don't see where it originates from. You don't see how it comes to the tree.

You see its effects, but you don't see it itself. And Jesus is comparing this to this work of the spirit that he just compared to new birth. Verse nine, Nicodemus said to him, how can these things be? You can just hear the man's struggle, can't you? To grasp what Jesus is saying, but what Jesus is saying to him is such new truth.

What Jesus is saying to him is so different from what he has heard before that you can just hear his struggle to grasp Jesus's meaning. How can these things be? Verse 10, Jesus answered him. Are you the teacher of Israel? And yet you do not understand these things. So a little bit of a jab. Are you the teacher of Israel?

And you don't understand these things. And that is the definite article there. Jesus didn't say, are you a teacher in Israel? He said, are you the Teacher Earlier we were told he's a ruler of the Jews, so he seems to occupy a chief teaching position of some sort. So are you the chief teacher and you don't understand these things?

It, it might go without saying that if you're the chief teacher that you should have received the new birth, don't you think? But even beyond that, if you're the chief teacher, then shouldn't you have understood these things? Or to put it another way, the implication here is. If you are the chief teacher, and you don't understand these things, then you need a teacher to teach them to you.

You need a teacher, such as the Spirit, to teach these things to you. Verse 11. Truly, truly, I say to you, We speak of what we know and bear witness of what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. So again, back to the same theme of receiving, of receiving and grasping and comprehending and believing and following, as opposed to the theme of being given this and yet not receiving it.

Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know and bear witness of what we've seen. But you do not receive our testimony. Why do you think Jesus is using the third person or the first person plural? I'm sorry, the first person plural. Why do you think he's, why do you think he's using the first person plural?

He says, again, we speak of what we know. And we bear witness to what we have seen. Now he's not talking about he and Nicodemus. He's not saying, hey, you and me, Nicodemus, we speak about the things that we know. Because here's what he says next. But you do not receive our testimony. Who are the our? Who is the we?

Could it be that Jesus is now beginning to draw into the conversation the reality of the Trinity, the reality of the Spirit? What, which is what he's talking about, the reality of the spirit together with the sun. And he's saying to Nicodemus, there are two that are testifying to you about what we have seen.

One is me and one is the spirit of whom we are speaking. The one whom you cannot see what he's doing. You can see the effects of what he's done. You can recognize. Where he's been and what he's done, and you can recognize the hearts he's changed, but you can't see him work. Could that be the what Jesus is alluding to here?

Now, verse 12, if I have told you earthly things and you do not believe me, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? So Jesus is using earthly examples to communicate spiritual truth, and he's saying, well, if you don't understand the earthly analogies. How will you understand the spiritual realities behind them, which is really that's teaching in parables?

That's what Jesus did was he taught in parables and what parables are what the word literally means is to throw alongside and so what a parable is is taking an earthly reality that you see and understand and laying it alongside a spiritual reality to say The earthly reality that you see is like the spiritual reality that you can't see.

And so you can't see the spiritual reality, but I can show you something of it or teach you something of it by saying that the spiritual reality is like this earthly reality that you do see. And

you see how Jesus has done that. The spiritual reality is like the earthly, earthly reality of birth. The spiritual reality is like the earthly reality of wind, which you see the effects of, but don't really comprehend.

The working of but then Jesus says, well, if you're not understanding the earthly reality, then you're not going to understand the spiritual reality that I've laid alongside of it. You see, I have told you earthly things and you do not believe. How can you believe? Now look at that phrase right there. How can you believe that's really the question that the whole conversation is about.

That's really the point of the conversation. How can you believe? And think about that. How can you believe, how can you believe in a saving way? Because I trust we all recognize that saving faith is a supernatural belief. Saving faith is far more than affirming the facts of the Bible. We all understand that.

Saving faith is far more than just simply affirming the Bible is true. Saving faith is a supernatural belief. So how can anyone believe when it is a supernatural belief? And that's really the question that's on the table between Jesus and Nicodemus. How can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? You, you're struggling with the earthly things.

So how are you going to believe the heavenly things? Verse 13. But no one has ascended into heaven except the one, except he who descended from heaven, the son of man. So now see this connection between verse 13 and verse 12. The connection is that word heaven. So if I told you earthly things and you don't understand them or believe them, how are you going to believe heavenly things?

And then Jesus says, no one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the son of man. Now, what does that have to do with the flow of the conversation? What it has to do is with that word heaven. In other words, Jesus is saying, I'm trying to help you understand heavenly things, but to understand heavenly things.

What you need is someone who has come from heaven to teach you these things. And I am that one to understand heavenly truths. You must have someone who has come from heaven to show you those heavenly truths. And I am he. Now, if we were really tracking with John, we might remember that back at the end of chapter one, he said, these were Jesus said, these words, Jesus said to them, truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the son of man.

So just shortly before this, Jesus had said that he is the connecting point. He is the one who connects together heaven and earth. Now he says to Nicodemus, the only way you're going to understand heavenly realities is if someone from heaven teaches you these realities. Now, verse 14, 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.

So here comes Jesus's illustration. He's trying to illustrate the point that he wants Nicodemus to see. And his illustration is this event that happened in Numbers chapter 21. As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness. So must the son of man be lifted up. So what does Jesus mean by lifted up?

There's two ways that we can think of being lifted up. There's sort of this more metaphorical way of lifting up. We can lift somewhat one up in our praises or we can speak good words about them. You know, we can, we can say, you know, this person just really lifts me up with their encouragement. And do we, do we lift Jesus up that way?

Certainly we do. We're supposed. But then there's the literal way of lifting up and this phrase will be used in John's gospel three times Exactly three times and all three times. That's John's meaning is not lifted up in someone's praises or adorations, but lifted up literally meaning lifted up upon a cross above the earth so here's what Jesus saying as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness and So must, so Jesus is making this comparison as so must as Moses lifted up the serpent in the same way.

So must the son of man be lifted up. He's Nicodemus is struggling to comprehend this truth. And Jesus is saying to him something that Nicodemus knows very well, Nicodemus, when Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness. Like that, the son of man must be lifted up. Now with that being said, let's now turn to numbers.

Chapter 21. If you've still got your finger there, you flip over there. Numbers Chapter 21. So in numbers chapter 21, as we pick up here, this is the illustration that Jesus pointed to, to Nicodemus. Nicodemus, I'm going to make a correlation to you. I'm going to make a one-to-One correlation, just like Moses lifted up the serpent.

So must the son of man be lifted up. So now, as we turn to Numbers 21, Numbers 21, what we find that's going on in Numbers chapter 21 is this recurring theme that happens over and over and over throughout the book of Numbers. And it's really easy to understand. It goes like this, God's people grumble.

God's not happy and Moses prays for them and God remains patient. That's, that's sort of the theme that's been going on throughout the whole book. And so Numbers chapter 21 is sort of the climax of that. That's sort of the, the big ultimate complaint in which God finally. So, verse four says enough of this grumbling and complaining, I'm going to do something about this.

So with that being said from verse four, we're just going to look at a few verses here, beginning from verse four, verse four from Mount Hor, they set out by way to the Red Sea. So they're going back. Remember, they came from the Red Sea. They're going back. They've been wandering. They're going all over.

They're going back to the Red Sea to go around the land of Edom because Edom wouldn't let them pass through. And the people became impatient on the way. Verse five. And the people spoke against God.

Now don't just glance over that. The people spoke against God. The people put voice to their accusations. The people gave witness to the unreliability of God, the untrustableness of God, the ungoodness of God. The people slandered God. with their words. The people spoke blasphemy against the God who had delivered them from slavery.

They voiced these harsh accusations. And so the thing to begin seeing is just the severity, the severity of what just happened. God's people whom he has redeemed out of slavery have spoken harsh words against him. They didn't just think harsh thoughts. They spoke harsh words

against him. And they spoke against God and against Moses saying, 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. Now, which is it? Is there no food or is the food worthless? Which one is it?

You see how not only did they slander God, they gave false testimony against God. They said there is no food and there is food. In essence, their grumbling and their complaining has made their, has, has painted their situation as worse than it really is. Kind of like Naomi, remember Naomi, she and Ruth return from the land of Moab and they return back to Bethlehem.

And here's Naomi and she tells everyone in Bethlehem, the Lord has just forsaken me. He has all these bad things that have happened to me and I'm all alone. Nobody is here with me. And the whole time Ruth, who has left her people, is standing right there. I always wondered, what does Ruth think about what Naomi said?

Um, no, nobody, nobody, I've got nobody. You see how she made her situation much worse. That's really what grumbling is. All grumbling is complaining against God, is it? If God is the giver of all things, if he's sovereign over his world, if all things come from his hand, then grumbling is against him. And grumbling really is taking the reality of this life And painting it in a worse picture, if you're honest and you reflect upon the times that you grumble, you would have to say to yourself, well, yeah, I do.

I do that as well. That's, that's what's happening when I'm grumbling and this is what's happening here with the people they're saying we've got no food when they really do have food and then they're complaining about the food that they have and keep in mind what this food is that they're complaining about.

It's the same food that Jesus is. Called the Bread of Heaven. It's the same food that the psalmist called the Bread of Heaven. You know, I think we all can have those times where we just long to see God manifest himself in our life in some visible, tangible way. Well, these Israelites saw that every day, six days a week, every day, except the Sabbath, they saw this visible manifestation of God's.

And they had come to loathe it and grumble about it. This is indeed a severe and a heinous sin. So Jesus's point is there are parallels. There are corresponding parallels. So, just as Moses lifted up the serpent, so must the Son of Man also be lifted up. So Nicodemus is having trouble seeing what Jesus wants him to see.

And Jesus is explaining to him spiritual realities. And to help Nicodemus see this, He takes Nicodemus to corresponding physical realities. The physical reality of the wilderness situation and the grumbling and the complaining is what Nicodemus knew of because he knew his Scriptures. And the spiritual reality is the connection Jesus wants him to make.

Verse 6. Then the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. And the people came to Moses and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against you. So they realize their sinful condition. They realize. What they have just done is a heinous sin before God.

And so they say, pray to the Lord that he would take away the way the serpents from us. So Moses prayed for the people, and then the Lord answers. 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 if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live. So the people sin, the result of their sin is a physical consequence. And the physical wrath of God is that these fiery serpents. Come to the people and bite them. And so a spiritual sin results in a physical consequence, the physical wrath, which brings about a physical situation, this physical situation of sickness and people are dying.

And then God prescribes a physical remedy. The physical remedy is, make this serpent, put it on a pole, people will look and they'll be healed. So you see the progression there. There's a problem, here's a physical problem, physical solution. And Jesus is giving all this to make a correlation to Nicodemus spiritual problem, spiritual remedy, spiritual answer, you see?

So, the first thing for us to see here is the deadliness of the two situations. If you see the deadliness of the two situations, the situation with the Israelites, Was easy to see the deadliness of that situation It was easy to see because these snakes would come and they would bite the people and the pipe people would get sick and they Had people dying so it's easy to look and to see that and say and for the people to say we have sinned against the Lord and he Sent these serpents upon us So that the consequences of our sin are something that we can see and touch and feel and see this person over here has died and this person over here is near death and this person over here is getting sick.

So we see the physical consequences of our sin and for that God then sends a physical remedy, which is the serpent, which brings about a physical healing. But they saw their sin because it was easy to see Nicodemus's problem is that he doesn't see that yet. Nicodemus doesn't see himself as those Israelites who had grumbled and complained against God.

Nicodemus, I think, has a view of himself much like Paul had of himself prior to that Damascus Road experience. Remember Paul? Prior to that, Paul thought he was serving the name of the Lord with great vigor. And with great honor until the risen Christ came upon him on that road to Damascus, and it was at that point that his eyes were open, the scales were removed from his eyes, and he could then see.

I haven't been serving the Lord at all. And I think that's where Nicodemus is right now. He does not see that his situation correlates with the Israelite situation because the Israelites had this physical demonstration of their sin. Nicodemus doesn't see that. He doesn't realize that. He cannot see that he is such a sinner in need of the saving grace of Christ.

He cannot see that the wages of his sin are death. Whereas the wages of the Israelite sin was death, and they saw it. They witnessed it. It was right there. He's having trouble making that connection. And you know, brothers and sisters, do you know that we, we are right, we are right to talk about how salvation is the grace of God that comes to us by faith and faith alone.

We are right to say that, but that doesn't mean that every aspect of our salvation can be received by faith. You know, there's a certain aspect of your salvation that cannot be received by

faith. It must be received by sight. You cannot believe by faith that you are a sinner. You must know that by sight.

You cannot read your Bible like we read our Bible and we believe when the Bible says that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. You cannot read that and say, I believe the Bible and the Bible tells me I'm a sinner and so therefore I believe I'm a sinner.

You have to know it. You have to see it. You can't take by faith. That the Bible says you're a sinner, and I know what that's like. I know what it's like to read the Scriptures, and the Scriptures tell me of my fallen condition, and I agree to that. But then you can have that heart that says, Well, yes, I believe I'm a sinner.

The Bible tells me I'm a sinner. But I don't really feel that bad. Certainly don't feel as bad as a lot of the people I see around me. Salvation cannot come to the one who believes themselves to be a sinner only by faith. You must know you're a sinner because you've experienced it, and you've seen it, and the Spirit has opened your eyes to your own true condition.

Nicodemus is right there right now. If Nicodemus were here and we were listening to this conversation that Jesus is having with him, and we said, Nicodemus, do you believe that you've sinned before God? I think he would have said yes, meaning that he believes the Scriptures taught him that all people have fallen.

But I'm not sure that Nicodemus saw it yet. The Israelites in the wilderness had no trouble seeing it because the snakes were biting them because of it. And so Nicodemus needs to see the spiritual reality, which is why Jesus takes him to that reality to say, just like the wilderness, So it is right now.

So the pole, the serpent on the pole, the cross, neither of those things were intended to be an inoculation against the possible sin. Neither of those things were intended to be the safeguard against sin. The pole and the serpent on the pole were not intended For those who might get bitten by a snake in the future, God doesn't, doesn't say put this serpent on a pole.

And that way, if anybody does get bit, then, then there'll be okay. Instead, the pole is the remedy for those who have been bitten. Just like the cross is the remedy for those who have not only sinned, but seen their sin and known it. This is why Jesus said, I didn't come for the healthy. I came for the sick.

So that's the first correlation to see. The second is easy to see as well, and it's simply this. The pole wasn't Moses's idea. The pole was God's idea. The serpent was God's idea. It was God who said to Moses, Do this. This must happen. Again from John, verse 14. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must.

That word must there. You can just see in that word or you should see in that word the sovereign plan of God. So must the son of man be lifted up that result that whoever believes in him may have eternal life for now. There's the purpose. Like we said, a couple of nights ago, that word for what that means is what's coming after that is the result of what came before it.

What comes after that is the purpose of what came before it. What comes after that is what explains what came before it. So for the sovereign plan of God, God loved the world in this way.

God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whoever believes in him, literally all of the believing ones, if we were to translate that literally all of the believing ones.

Should not perish, but have eternal life. So this connection, this connection that he wants, Nicodemus to make the pole in the wilderness is God's work. It's God's plan. It's God's idea. It's God's remedy. Just as the cross is God's work, it's God's plan, it's God's remedy. The gospel is not God's call to people to come to him and do something to achieve this salvation.

The gospel is not God's call to people to come to me and once you come to me, then we can do this or we can do this and we can complete your salvation. The gospel is God's announcement of what He has done, and what He has done is to secure the remedy for what we have done. And the gospel is God's call for people to see that, and believe that, and recognize that it is His plan, and He has done it.

It's the announcement of His work. So that's what we see. The pole is God's work, just like the cross is God's work. Thirdly, and this one is, well, perhaps a little bit stunning, but let's just see it in the passage just quite plainly. As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must... So if we're paying attention, what we just recognize, what we just saw was that Jesus just compared himself to a snake.

You see it? He makes a one to one correlation. As Moses lifted up the serpent, so must the Son of Man be lifted up. The serpent was put on a pole. The pole lifted up the serpent. Christ is put on a cross. The cross lifts up Christ. Jesus just made a correlation. He just compared himself. To a snake. If these weren't God's words, these would be blasphemous because we recognize, we talked about this last night, we recognize the imagery of serpents and snakes because it is a such a consistent imagery in the pages of Scripture, beginning all the way back at the beginning of Genesis, as the serpent comes and the serpent comes to the woman with the intention of deceiving the woman into falling into sin, and that imagery continues all through the Old Testament.

Last night we talked about Goliath. And how we should have in our minds Goliath. As this man who, this giant man who stands up wearing armor that's fashioned to look like a snake. He is a giant snake like man. The ancient god of the Philistines, Dagon, was a snake creature. And then the prophets pick up on this theme.

Daniel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, all of them will compare Egypt and Babylon to the snake. And then we come to the New Testament and we hear Jesus. Calling people a brood of vipers. We hear John the baptizer causing calling people a brood of vipers and the imagery continues all the way to the final book of our Bible and which we read of the dragon, the dragon, which is a winged snake.

So all the way through our Scriptures, this imagery of a snake. is the imagery that means the curse of sin, the fallenness of man, the enemy of man. And Jesus just compared himself to a snake. If he hadn't done it, it would be blasphemous for us to do it. So what is the meaning of this? The meaning is this.

The remedy is both like the curse and different from the curse. The remedy is both like the curse And different from the curse, you know, God could have told Moses to have the people look at anything. He could have told Moses, have the people lift up a sheep on a pole, have them look at the sheep, lift up a ram, have them look at the ram.

He could have said, have everybody look at that camel over there. He could have said, have the people look at that cloud or look at that mountain. God could have designated anything, but he didn't. He designated The very thing that had bitten them and remember what the serpents were. The serpents were God's wrath upon their sin.

So the thing that they're to look upon is the very thing that was the wrath of God or the curse of God upon their sin. Fashion the snake. So it has to be both like the curse, but different from the curse as well. Because notice God didn't say to Moses, Get one of the dead serpents and put it on a pole and lift it up one of those serpents that bites Somebody take one of those and tie it to a pole and lift it up.

It couldn't be a real serpent It couldn't be a live serpent. It couldn't be a dead serpent. It had to be a what? fashioned Serpent it had to be a made Serpent. So now let's connect the dots the remedy had to be like the curse but also unlike the curse like the son of man who would Romans 8 chapter Romans 8 verse 3 come in the likeness of sinful man or Galatians Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.

So the remedy has to be like the curse, but it also has to be different from the curse because it has to be made to be the curse. The remedy can't be sin. The remedy can't be a sinful Savior. The remedy has to be a Savior that's It's made to be sent or to use another word, fashioned to be sin. Do you see it?

Do you see it? The remedy for the curse has to be like the curse, but also different from the curse. Just as the serpent had to be like the wrath of God, the curse. But also different from the curse so that the son of man when he's lifted up on the cross is Made to be sin, but he wasn't lifted up as a sinner He was lifted up as the perfect sinless son of God who was fashioned and made to be sin You see Nicodemus's struggle.

I think his struggle really centers upon seeing himself As that center in need of that remedy and need of that redemption, because for Jesus to be Nicodemus, his savior, this is the same as true for you for Christ to be your savior. Christ cannot be sin in theory for Christ to be your savior. Christ cannot be this amalgamation of all the world's sin for Christ to be your savior.

He has to be your sin. If Christ is not made to be your sin, then your sin has not been paid for, and you still owe for it. Christ can't die as the representative of your sin. He has to be made to be your sin. In order for your sin to be atoned for, your sin had to be on that cross. You cannot see Christ in this theoretical way that he's, in theory, he's, he's dying as my substitute.

You must see him as Nicodemus had to see him as his own sin. The Israelites had no trouble doing that. They had no trouble relating that serpent to the serpents that bit them to the grumbling that they had just done against God. They had no trouble doing that because it was physical, physical, physical.

Nicodemus needs to be led along that path because his connections are spiritual, spiritual, spiritual. And so Jesus says, let me show you this physical analogy so that you can see the spiritual truth behind it You must see Nicodemus that you are just like those Israelites who opened their mouth against God You are just like those Israel Israelites who lied about God who gave false testimony about God's care for them You are just like them Nicodemus and the Son of

Man must be lifted up for your sin Or your sin is not atoned for just as the son of man, just as the Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness.

So much the son of man be lifted up. Now, the last thing to see is this, and then we'll end all this with, with this final thing. The last thing to see is back now to numbers chapter 21. Can you imagine with me numbers chapter 21, the sit, the scenario there's, there's this grumbling and complaining. The snakes have come out.

They've bitten people. A lot of people have died. Other people are sick. And there's this, this serpent that Moses fashions and he puts it on this pole and then he spreads the word everyone has been bitten. Look at this snake and you will be healed. Can you imagine that there would have been some skepticism?

Is that reasonable to assume that some would have been skeptical? And I would imagine that the level of skepticism probably was directly related to how sick they were. The ones who maybe had just gotten bitten and their leg was really, Oh, that's really smart. That's really, that really hurts. Well, look at this pole.

Look at this serpent on the pole. Okay. Whatever. But then the one who was on their deathbed, maybe the skepticism had faded away by that point in the same way, in the same way God uses affliction in our life. Right. But the larger point is certainly there must've been skepticism for some to say, you gotta be kidding me.

It can't be like that. It can't be that easy. This is a snake bite, man. What's looking at a pole going to do to a snake bite? Kind of like Naaman. You remember Naaman? The leper who comes to Elisha? Or he's going to come to Elisha? And then he's sent away before he even gets there to say go wash in the Jordan seven times.

You remember his response? No. I wasted my time. It can't be that easy. This is leprosy. I'm not dirty. This is leprosy. In a similar way, I would imagine that some would have responded the same way. That's too easy. That's too easy. It's got to be more to it than that. I've got to do something more than that.

I can't just look at a pole. I've got to do something more than that. Well, the word that's used to this translated look here does mean more than just glance at, you know, there's a word in the Hebrew that means to look like if you, if you, looked at someone crossing the street or something like that, or you looked at this thing over here or whatever, but then the word that's used here, it's a word that really carries with it.

The connotation of not just looking, but looking with trust. Looking with regard, looking with a, an intense attentiveness. Let me give you a couple of examples of where else the word is used. Genesis 13, the same word shows up. The Lord said to Abram, after a lot had separated from him, lift your eyes and, here it is, look from the place where you are, northward, southward, eastward, and westward, and all this will be yours.

So you see the connotation there? God is saying, look, and all this will be given to you. So Abraham was being asked to look with belief. He was asked to look with a trust. Shows up again in Genesis 15. God brought Abram outside and said, look toward the heavens and number the stars if you're able to number them.

So you see the same idea there. Look to the stars. And if you can count them, these are your descendants. And so Abraham had to look at the stars, not just in a way of just looking up there to say, Oh, those are nice stars. He had to look with trust. He had to look with belief. He had to look with, with regard.

That's the word that's used here. Look to the serpent, not just to see it, look to it with regard for it. Look for it with attentiveness to it. Look to it even with belief and trust. Jesus uses a synonym for that when he says, That everyone who looks and believes will receive eternal life. But then we come along, just like Naaman, and say, It just can't.

It just simply can't be that easy. There has to be something that we have to do to that. There's got to be something that we've got to add to it. But there's not.

In fact, there can't be. Because by adding to it, you negate it. By adding to it, you strip it. By adding to it, you blaspheme it. Because the command is simply look, look. A lot of people have connected together. this passage with the conversion of Charles Spurgeon. We all, I'm sure you're familiar with the name Charles Spurgeon.

Charles Spurgeon, probably the greatest preacher of the 19th century, an amazing man that God used in amazing ways. Well, his conversion is an interesting story. He tells of his conversion in his autobiography. Charles Spurgeon was converted at age 15. And when he was converted, Spurgeon was, well, he was Nicodemus because at age 15, Spurgeon was already learned in the Scriptures.

By age 15, Spurgeon had already read more theology than most all of us will read in a lifetime. He was already highly conversant in theology and the Scriptures. But just like Nicodemus, he hadn't received conversion. He believed everything. He didn't doubt the Scriptures, just like Nicodemus doesn't doubt the Scriptures.

But nevertheless, he had not yet received that new birth. And so the story of his new birth is an interesting story. Let me read it to us. He writes this, I sometimes think I might've been in darkness and despair even now had it not been for the goodness of God. In sending a snowstorm one Sunday morning when I was going to a place of worship, so he goes out.

It's a Sunday morning. It's this heavy snowstorm and he can't make it to his normal church. He says, when I could go no further, I turned down a side street and came to a little primitive Methodist chapel in that chapel. There might've been a dozen or 15 people. The minister did not even come that morning.

He was snowed up, I suppose. A poor man, a shoemaker, a tailor or something of that sort, went up to the pulpit to preach in his stead. He was obliged to stick to his text for the simple reason that he had nothing else to say. His text was this, Isaiah 45 and verse 22, look unto me and be ye saved all the ends of the earth.

He did not even pronounce the words rightly. But that did not matter. There I was, I thought, a glimpse of hope for me in this text. He began thus. My dear friends, this is a very simple text indeed. It says, look. Now that does not take a deal of effort. It ain't lifting your foot or your finger. It's just look.

Well, a man need not go to college to learn how to look. You may be the biggest fool and yet you can look. A man need not be worth a thousand a year to look. Anybody can look. A child can look. But this is what the text says. And then it says, look unto me, I, he said in broad Essex, many a year looking to yourselves, no looking there, you'll find no comfort in yourselves.

Then the good man followed up this way from his text. Look unto me. I'm sweating great drops of blood. Look unto me. I'm hanging on the cross. Look, I'm dead and buried. Look under me. I rise again. Look under me. I ascend to the heavens. I am sitting at the father's right hand. Oh, poor sinner. Look to me. Look to me.

And when he had got about that length and managed to spin out about 10 minutes, he was at the end of his tether. And then he looked straight at me under the gallery. And I dare say with so few present, he knew me to be a stranger. And then he said, young man, you look very miserable. Well, I did, but I had not been accustomed to have remarks made on my personal appearance from the pulpit.

However, it was a good blow and well struck. He continued, and you will always be miserable, miserable in life and miserable in death. If you do not obey my text, but if you obey now this moment, you will be saved. And then lifting his hands and shouting as only a primitive Methodist can young man, look to Christ, look to Christ.

And then and there, the cloud was gone, the darkness had rolled away, and that very moment I saw the sun. I could have risen that moment and sung with the most enthusiastic of them of the precious blood of Christ. I looked and I looked till I thought I would look my eyes out.

He was just like Nicodemus. He needed the Spirit of God to come to him and show him his need, his sin, and he had to look and see.

Now the final thing to say is simply this. If all we're told to do is look, and if, as we are told, this looking is the difference between eternity with Christ and eternity in torment, how intense would our looks be if we really remind ourselves? That that look to him is all the difference.

Would we try to stare a hole into that serpent on the pole? Or would we glance? Once a week on Sunday morning, glance over his way, give him a courteous nod, and look away. What would our look really be like? Now, brothers and sisters, the intensity of your look to Christ doesn't save you. Christ saves you.

But it is a reality that if He has saved you, your look to that cross will be more than just a passing glance. You will look as though your eternity depends on it. Because it does.