

Sunday, September 1, 2024 am

Lifting Up Christ

John 3:14-17

Today, I want to examine a text that ties the Old Testament to the New Testament. It is an occasion when Jesus referred to an Old Testament event and applied it to Himself and us. It was part of a conversation Jesus had with Nicodemus, a Jewish ruler (likely part of the council) who would also become a disciple of Jesus. He approaches Jesus and acknowledges that He must be from God because, “*no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with Him.*” John 3:2. This leads to a conversation about our need to be born again (a description of being saved). The conversation eventually leads to our text. Today, I want to briefly examine the 2 points Jesus made and then make an application to us as His followers.

I. The Serpent Moses Lifted Up

- a. The event is recorded in Numbers 21:4-9. Israel is wandering in the wilderness. They, once again, are complaining against Moses and God. Life has been hard for them, but God has protected them continually in the wilderness. Every day they awoke to food for the day. But they complained and on this occasion they even described God’s provisions as “this worthless bread”. So YHWH sent fiery serpents into the camp and many people died.
- b. As was typical, when being punished, they “repented” and asked Moses to pray to YHWH to take away the serpents. This time, instead of reacting immediately, YHWH told Moses to make a fiery serpent and set in on a pole. He did, making a bronze serpent. And when one was bitten by a serpent, if they looked at the bronze serpent, they would live.
- c. There are many lessons from this event, but one I want to focus on is how this relates to our salvation. There are 3 elements associated with our salvation: 1) God’s part which can be summarized by the word “grace”, 2) Our faith – believing God’s word and promises that He will save us if we obey Him, and 3) Our response – because we believe God, we do what He tells us and it results in our salvation. Consider the following texts: Ephesians 2:8-9, 1 Peter 3:20-21.
- d. Let us relate this to our text: If one was bitten, the ONLY way they could be saved was to BELIEVE (FAITH) that if they looked at the bronze serpent they would be healed, and then they had to ACT (OBEDIENCE) by actually looking at the bronze serpent. THEN God, BY GRACE, healed them.
- e. This pattern is consistent in several places in the Old Testament – E.g., Noah being saved in the Ark (Genesis 6:9ff), Israel conquering Jericho (Joshua 6).

II. Jesus was Lifted Up

- a. Jesus’ primary point to Nicodemus is that He must die so that mankind could be saved. A study of the gospels shows this throughout. Jesus continually emphasized He needed to die and be raised from the dead for our salvation
 - i. John 8:28, as Jesus interacted with the religious leaders on one occasion, He said, *“When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things.”*
 - ii. John 12:31-33, *“Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself. This He said, signifying by what death He would die.”*
 - iii. Matthew 26:28 as He was instituting the Lord’s supper, that the cup represented, *“My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.”*

- b. Of course, Jesus died by crucifixion. Matthew 27:35, Mark 15:24-25, Luke 23:33, John 19:16-18, etc. So in a very literal sense, He was lifted up.
- c. And as a result of His crucifixion, we can be saved.
 - i. 1 Peter 3:18 notes, *For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit,*
 - ii. Romans 5:8, *But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*
 - iii. 1 Corinthians 1:21-24, 2:2, Paul determined not to preach anything except Christ crucified. Clearly in that text, what he had in mind was how through the crucifixion of Jesus, we can be saved.
 - iv. This is the fulcrum of the message of the gospel! See 1 Corinthians 15:1-3, *...For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,...*
- d. How does this relate to our salvation? Let's go back to our text and recall the bronze serpent lifted up by Moses. We noted 3 broad elements related to salvation.
 - i. God's grace – In our text we read, “God so loved the world...” – that is His grace. God has done His part – Ephesians 1:7, 2:4-8, Romans 3:23-24 – we are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Just as God did HIS part to save those Israelites bitten, God has done everything we cannot do for ourselves, to make access to salvation possible.
 - ii. Our faith – we have to be taught and believe if we are to be saved. In our text, TWICE Jesus referred to believing in Him. Romans 10:8-10 notes that with the heart one believes unto salvation. Vs. 17 notes, *“So the faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”* In the wilderness, they knew there was a bronze serpent in the midst of the camp. If bitten, they had to believe that if they looked upon that serpent that YHWH would heal them. There was certainly nothing medical or natural about what they were told to do. But without faith there would be no healing. Similarly, if we do not believe in Jesus – who He is, what He has done and has promised to do, we cannot be healed.
 - iii. Our obedience – we must understand that our belief is not mere acknowledgment, but an active response. That is clearly emphasized throughout the New Testament. Hebrews 5:9 notes that Jesus became the author of salvation to all who believe Him. We do what we are told to do. Jesus taught Mark 16:16 that we need to believe and be baptized to be saved. Romans 6:3-4 ties the act of baptism to His DBR. Galatians 3:27 – ties baptism to being clothed with Christ. Philippians 3:8-11 notes that we live, “being conformed to His death...” so that we may obtain the resurrection. Going back to the bronze serpent, when they believe they STILL had to act. Similarly, when we believe in Jesus, we need to obey Him – Cf. Matthew 7:21-23.
 - iv. Tying this together – when a serpent bit them, they had to believe and act to be healed by God; similarly, when we are bitten by sin and dying (Romans 6:23), we need to look to Jesus for salvation and then DO what He has instructed us to do. That is how these 2 events are tied together.

III. **How can we lift up Jesus today?**

- a. Understanding the point of salvation in this text, let us notice what is expected of one who has looked to Jesus and obeyed the gospel.

- b. Both the serpent and Christ Jesus were literally lifted up. And both resulted in salvation. But when we think of that expression, we think of elevating something. As Christians, we ought to “lift up” Christ. We ought to elevate Him in our lives and people ought to see Jesus in us. So let us notice some ways that we can “lift up” Christ.
- c. How can I “lift up” Christ?
- i. **By the example that we set** – we are to live where others can see Christ in us (Matthew 5:16). 1 John 2:6 notes that we ought to walk as He walked. 1 Corinthians 11:1 – we seek to imitate Him in our lives. Colossians 3:17 – whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord (by His authority). Colossians 3:1-3 – our life is to be hidden with Christ in God.
 - ii. **By possessing the mind of Christ** – Philippians 2:5, 1 Peter 4:1, *Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin.* Think of the expression, WWJD. Before we act, think how Jesus would have acted in that situation. Apply Matthew 7:12 – the golden rule;
 - iii. **By a willingness to suffer for Him** – 1 Peter 2:21-24, 4:12-16 where Peter notes that we partake in His sufferings. Cf. Galatians 6:17 where Paul noted that He bore the marks of the Lord Jesus (a reference to his sufferings). When we refuse to compromise to the point of suffering, we are certainly lifting Him up.
 - iv. **As we partake of the Lord’s Supper** – 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. Each week we remember Him and proclaim His death until He finally returns. This means that we lift Him up by worshipping Him.
 - v. **By preaching Him** – Galatians 3:1 – Paul notes that Jesus had been clearly portrayed as crucified. 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 Paul described how his preaching made known Christ crucified. Paul was clearly lifting up Jesus by preaching about who He was and what He has done for us. When we tell others about Jesus, we are exalting Him.

Jesus was lifted up so that we might have hope beyond this life. Have we looked to Him to save us? And with that commitment in mind, are we willing to continue to “lift Him up” as we live our lives? That is the ONLY commitment that will be acceptable to Him. Think about it!