

John 3: 14 and 15; “The Son of Man Lifted Up”, Sermon # 16 in the series – “That all May Honor the Son”, A Communion Sermon delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on May 5th, 2013.

As we think about this conversation which the Lord Jesus had with Nicodemus I hope that you will see the progression. Jesus begins speaking with Nicodemus about the New Birth in verses 3-13, and then He progresses to speaking with him about the gospel itself; how a person can be saved. This is the progression which is seen in the conversion of any soul to Christ. First comes the work of the Spirit in illumination and conviction of sin. Before a person is born again, there is often in their mind and heart a certain emptiness and a meaninglessness to life unless they can understand the truth about God. What was Nicodemus looking for when he came to Jesus? What could he do to find the truth about life? He did the right thing. He came directly to Christ. The person whom God is intending to save is being drawn by the Father, and illumined by the Spirit to have their eyes opened to their need of being saved by Christ Himself. At first, when this good work is going on in their soul, they begin to realize that something more is needed than what they have by nature. Something more is needed than their being religious. They have come to see that they need grace. But where can they find it, or how they can be born again, or how they can enter the kingdom of God? This was the point that Nicodemus was at in this conversation with Jesus. And so the Lord Jesus was very graciously guiding Nicodemus as He does in the conversion of all of those chosen by the Father. We need to see that as the Spirit is working the grace of regeneration in the New Birth, that He always will move in that person's heart to create faith. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. On this day, so long ago the Essential Word of God was standing right in front of Nicodemus, speaking to him at that very time. Jesus knew that He must preach concerning Himself if Nicodemus was to be saved. The Lord Jesus is the author and perfecter of faith. When He spoke to Nicodemus about faith, He gave him the illustration of the serpent being lifted up by Moses in the Wilderness. And then, 2ndly, He spoke of Himself being lifted up as the fulfillment of that type on the cross. And then 3rd, He spoke of Himself as lifted up in the free offer of the gospel. I pray that you will see how relevant and pertinent this will be to our taking the Lord's Supper together in just a few minutes.

1st of all – When Jesus spoke to Nicodemus about faith, He gave him the illustration of the serpent being lifted up by Moses in the Wilderness.

“As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up.” The one is a type of the other. The serpent on the pole is a type of His death on the cross for sinners. Let's turn back to Numbers Chapter 21, verse 4 and see if we can learn more about this. “Then they journeyed from Mount Hor by

the Way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the soul of the people became very discouraged on the way.” “And the people spoke against God and against Moses: ‘Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness:’” “For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread.” “So the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people; and many of the people of Israel died.” “Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, ‘We have sinned, but we have spoken against the Lord and against you; pray to the Lord that He take away the serpents from us.’” “So Moses prayed for the people.” “Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live.’” “So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived.” Now, we learn here that the children of Israel had become a very discouraged people. “The soul of the people had become very discouraged on the way,” it says. And you and I should ask the question, “Why was their soul discouraged?” If we were to turn over to such places as Hebrews 4: 2, we would see that their soul was discouraged because they were not trusting in God. There was a gospel being preached to them in many of things that they saw God do for them. He gave them manna from heaven and water from the rock, and other things like this; but this word of the gospel which was being preached to them, it did not profit them, because it was not being mixed with faith, in those who heard it. They were not believing that He was doing them good, but rather they repeatedly let themselves fall into the sin of unbelieving, distrustful thinking, in relation to God, in their minds and hearts. They did not like being led by God through the wilderness. They were so deceived that they thought that they would rather go back to Egypt, than to be in the wilderness with their loving, Almighty God, who had redeemed them from their bondage in Egypt. They thought that God was not providing for them in any sort of a generous way. Actually, God was doing them good, and He was providing for all of their needs in their wilderness wanderings, but they did were not responding in faith to what He was doing. God simply wanted them to look to Him for everything. He wanted them to pray and ask Him to help them. Let me ask you this morning if you are looking to God for every good thing, or whether you mistrust His Divine Providence; the things that He leads you into and brings you through by His mighty and power grace. You see, these people were not responding in faith to all that He was providentially leading them into and through. They thought and they acted as though God was against them. In all of the great and mighty things that He was doing for them, they were they were not attempting to learn God’s ways of doing things. And so, many times they fell to complaining against God and against Moses, as they did here.

Let me ask you this morning if you are a person of a joyful believing heart this morning? Are you trusting in God’s good ordering of all things in your life? “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the

Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.” (James 1: 17) Can you rejoice that He perfectly knows all that you need? Or, as He looks at you, does He see an unbelieving complaining person? You cannot trust that God is working all things together for good for you, even though you are a Christian. You do not believe that God is good in all that He orders and permits in your life. You want the ultimate control over your life and you somehow have come to believe that you have the right to disagree with God over the things which He orders in relation to your learning His ways. I am saying that this is what leads to deep discouragement. Psalm 27, verse 13 says – “I would have lost heart, unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.” “Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait I say, on the Lord.” That was written by King David. He would have lost heart; He would have become discouraged, He would have fainted unless He had believed in the goodness of the Lord. Do you believe in the goodness of the Lord to you? What enables you to believe in the goodness of the Lord to you in all that you are going through? Notice, how in the verses that we are considering here in Numbers 21, that it was the Lord who sent fiery serpents among the people and they bit the people. This was the just judgment of God upon these unbelieving people, for they were sinning against Him in their unbelief. And it says here, that many of the people died from this. Unbelief is a very great sin that deserves God’s sending stings and bites into the consciences of both believers and unbelievers. It was the devil who first disguised himself as a serpent in the garden of Eden; who deceived Eve into thinking that she would not die if she ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It was unbelief on Adam’s part, disbelief in the word of God, and heeding the voice of his wife, that brought upon him the curse of God upon the ground, and upon his trying to find favor through his own works; the very predicament which he passed down to all of us, so that we are stung and bitten by the serpents of our sins. We die because of Adam’s sin. We sin and are under the curse of the law because we confirm Adam’s sin by our own unbelief. What is the remedy?

These people were dying right and left. What should they do? They did the only thing that they knew to do. They came to Moses, confessing their sins; that they had spoken against the Lord and against him, and then they asked Moses to pray to the Lord that He would take away the serpents from them. And what did Moses do? He prayed, just as they had asked. He prayed, and the Lord said this to him: “Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live.” This is the only place in all the word of God where God commanded a person to make a graven image, and it was not to represent the invisible God who is altogether holy; it was made to represent the sin of man, which Jesus became on our behalf. This graven image became a type of Jesus Christ on the cross. Jesus Christ is the very image of the living God. Moses made a fiery serpent; a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole so that it was lifted up.

And everyone who looked at it, lived. Our sins flow out of our mighty passions of unbelief in all that God has said. But Christ took upon Himself our human nature which is represented by the bronze that this serpent was cast from. The Lord Jesus was humble and lowly in His human nature, but glorious in His divinity. His glory was veiled in human flesh. “He who knew no sin, became sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” (2 Corinthians 5: 21) Christ was fiery and passionate to obey all of God’s law, and to do His will perfectly on your behalf, dear sinner and dear saint. And He was lifted up on the cruel wooden cross so that all could see that He was the propitiation, He was the full satisfaction, the wrath-removing sacrifice, for the sins of all who would look to Him. When you look to Jesus, which is an act of faith, you will find that you will live. All the sting of sin, all the venom of Satan who would try to destroy you, is taken away, and you are forgiven. And you are justified, and you are sanctified because Jesus became sin on your behalf. That is why Moses was instructed to make a serpent and place it on a pole. Moses who well represents the Holy Law of God, makes a serpent to represent Christ. Christ the sinless sacrifice is seen by God, as He considered Christ in strict justice, to be the sinner, to be the loathsome serpent of sin while He punished Jesus at the cross. This is what the Old Testament people of God had to look to if they would be saved from the poison of the serpent’s bite. And those who looked, lived. Moses making the bronze serpent, and lifting it up on a pole is a type of Christ in His passion and death on the cross. This is what we will remember in the Supper in just a few minutes; Jesus was made sin for you, dear believer.

2nd – The Lord Jesus spoke of Himself being lifted up as being the fulfillment of that type on the cross.

“Even so, must the Son of Man be lifted up.” The “Even so” shows us that there is an anti-type to this type. “Even as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up.” I would have you to take notice of the word “must”. “Even so, must the Son of Man be lifted up.” I want you to think about this truth with me now, that it was absolutely essential to your salvation that Jesus be lifted up on the cross. It was absolutely essential to your coming to have saving faith, and your being able to exercise that faith in your most discouraging and distressing moments. Jesus must be lifted up to die upon the cross. In doing so He purchased everything necessary for you to become a Christian and to live the Christian life. It was not the strength of your own human faith that saved you from your sins. It is not presently the strength of your own human faith that allows you to face your greatest discouragements. It is only the grace which Jesus purchased for you through His blood and righteousness which gives the real life, and the real strength to your faith. Oh, how I hope that you see this and will believe this all through your Christian life. If you had the strength of faith to save yourself from your sins, if you really had the strength of faith in yourself to be able to persevere to the end, then why did your Lord Jesus have to

die? He could have simply come and taught you what you needed to do in His word, and then said to you, "Have at it". But that is not at all what He teaches us. The Bible teaches us that the Lord Jesus is the author and perfecter of our faith, and that we are to be continually looking to Him for supplies of grace. The Bible teaches us that only in the Lord are righteousness and strength, and that is why we are to continually look to Him. And so all that we need to do to come to saving faith and to exercise saving faith is to look to Him. Let us see that we do this, as we come to the Lord's table this morning. We need to look to Christ as crucified for us, but we need also to look to Him as raised from the dead. We need very much to see that faith is only created in us by our looking to Him, and seeing Him as having died, and having been raised from the dead. "Look unto Me all the ends of the earth, and be saved!" "For I am God, and there is no other." (Isaiah 45: 22) I would have you to remember this as you come down now, and assemble in front for the Lord's Supper.

3rd – I hope that you can see, that in these verses, that Jesus as He spoke of Himself, He spoke of Himself as lifted up, so that none would perish, and that "the whoever" would believe.

Listen to the text again. "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." The intent of God in the gospel, as it is being conveyed to us here by Christ, is that no one hearing it would ever perish in their sins. God's love, as we shall see when we study the 16 verse, is shown in His giving Christ to the whole world of Mankind-Sinners. That does not mean that we believe that it is God's decretive will that all mankind will be saved. It means that whoever places their faith in the Lord Jesus will find life in His name. We believe in a particular redemption of persons through a definite atonement which was purchased by the sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ. That atonement is sufficient in its value and in its power, to save all of the people who have ever lived. But Christ here limits the number of those who will be called and given grace, to whoever will believe in Him. How do we have assurance as to whether we have saving faith in Christ or not? Ask yourself whether you have believed in Christ's finished work of righteousness and suffering on your behalf. Do you believe that Christ fully satisfied the law? Do you believe that He suffered, bled, and died for your sins? That is the beginning of true assurance. But how do I know that I have the kind of faith which will persevere throughout my life, and that I remain true to Him, to the end?

I think that that question can be best answered by our turning over to John 15, verse 1. Jesus is saying to His disciples, "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser." "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit." "You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you." "Abide in Me, and I in you." "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine,

neither can you, unless you abide in Me.” “I am the vine, you are the branches.” “He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.” “If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.” “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.” “By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.” You can know that you have the kind of faith which will persevere to the end if you see Christ as the source of all of your good thoughts, good words, and good deeds. He is the source of all the spiritual good fruit in your life. Do you believe in Christ’s finished work? Then you are clean. You have been washed in regeneration by the washing of water with the word of God.

Now, then, what is your greatest duty? It is to abide in Christ; to see all of your strength to do what is right, and to love God and other people, as coming from Him. You abide in Him. You remain in the doctrine of Christ’s death and resurrection as being the basis of all of your salvation from beginning to end. You derive your everyday spiritual life and strength from Christ, and this allows you to begin and to continue to bear fruit for Him. Notice that there are some branches which do not bear fruit. This means that there are some people who profess to be Christians, but because they do not have the life of Christ within them, they are unable to abide in Him; they are unable to bear fruit because they are not deriving their spiritual life from Him. Theirs is really a selfish and worldly life. These are people who will not remain in the teaching of Christ, nor will they be transformed by it because they do not understand what it means to abide in the first place. First you are made clean; then you abide in Him. You, as a true branch in Jesus Christ, cannot bear fruit unless you abide in Him. You abide in Him by continued acts of faith in Him, by the power of the grace which has been given to you. You believe in Christ crucified for your sins, raised for your justification, and having all grace to give to you as you abide in the truth of His Word. This supper that we are now about to receive, shows us that the basis of our spiritual life is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ; not our promises to Him of what we will do, but His promise to us of grace to help us in all that we do for Him. Our salvation is based upon the promises of what God has done, and also what He is doing for us now. We continue in that. We abide in that. We rest upon His promise and believe that we shall be given grace to persevere to the end, because the Father is pruning us. He is taking away the things in our life which prevent fruit from being born to Him. And Christ is supplying us with His precious grace because we are united to Him by faith, and we also abide in Him by faith. Let us pray to bear fruit for Him in the days to come and prove to be His disciples.