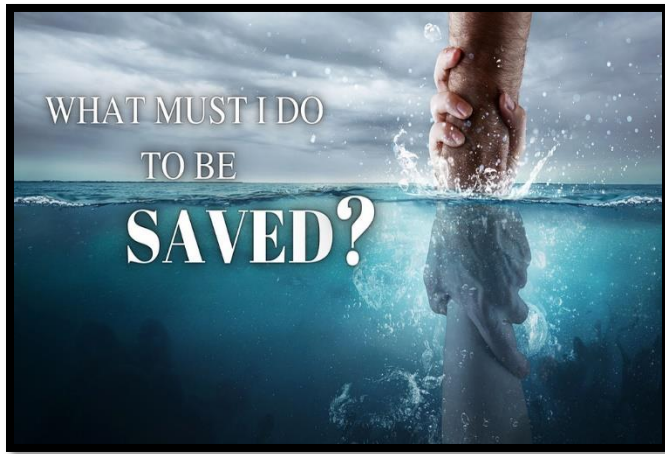


Lifted Up

John 3:14-15, Numbers 21:4-9

Online Sermon: http://www.mckeesfamily.com/?page_id=3567

Imagine what courage¹ it must have taken for a Pharisees and member of the ruling council who were antagonistic towards Christ² to publicly declare “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with Him” (John 3:2)! “Knowing that Nicodemus’ contemporaries believed all Jews



would enter the kingdom of God through resurrection on the last day, the only exceptions being those who denied the faith and committed acts of apostasy,”³ Jesus boldly and in contradiction to this belief stated, “very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again” (3:3).⁴ Nicodemus asked Jesus how this could be possible, surely one cannot enter their mother’s womb a second time (3:4)? Jesus told him it was not the flesh but the Spirit of God, who in the manner He pleased

caused the new birth to occur.⁵ It is at this point that Nicodemus pressed Jesus for a “deeper and higher explanation of the new birth but since he had an unregenerate heart”⁶ instead of Jesus talking to him in abstract terms that the spiritually blind and deaf cannot discern⁷ Jesus pointed Nicodemus to the story of Moses lifting up a snake on a pole to help explain how the Son of Man was to be lifted up on a cross to provide salvation for all.⁸ The following sermon is going to review John 3:14-15 and Numbers 21:4-9 to learn how to proclaim this Good News in a manner that the lost of this world might understand, be born again and receive eternal life!

¹ Jon Paulien, “[Nicodemus \(Person\)](#),” ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1105.

² Colin G. Kruse, [John: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 4, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 106.

³ Colin G. Kruse, [John: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 4, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 107.

⁴ John Piper, [Sermons from John Piper \(2000–2014\)](#) (Minneapolis, MN: Desiring God, 2014).

⁵ John Piper, [Sermons from John Piper \(2000–2014\)](#) (Minneapolis, MN: Desiring God, 2014).

⁶ John Piper, [Sermons from John Piper \(2000–2014\)](#) (Minneapolis, MN: Desiring God, 2014).

⁷ C. H. Spurgeon, “[The Mysteries of the Brazen Serpent](#),” in *The New Park Street Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 3 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1857), 365.

⁸ Colin G. Kruse, [John: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 4, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 112.

The Bronze Snake

Since Jewish scholars spent a large part of their day studying the Pentateuch Jesus' reference to Numbers 21:4-9 would have been familiar to Nicodemus.⁹ After the Lord had given Israel victory over the Canaanite king of Arad we are told that to keep from entering Edomite territory (Numbers 20:21)¹⁰ Israel traveled to the eastern desert area near Mount Hor¹¹ which



was described as “some of the most inhospitable territory on earth.”¹² During this incredibly difficult journey¹³ the people spoke against God and Moses saying, “why have you brought us out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food” (21:5)! Due to their “disparaging comment on the bread from heaven being worthless (Pss. 78:24–25; 105:40; cf. John 6:31)”¹⁴ and an overall lack of faith and trust in God, “the Lord sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the

people and many Israelites died” (20:6)! As they had done in the past when punished the people of Israel confessed their sins and asked Moses to “pray the Lord would take the snakes away” (20:7).¹⁵ When Moses prayed to God the remedy God gave was to “make a snake and put it on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live” (20:8). God did not remove the snakes altogether but instead chose to keep them near Israel to discipline and test their “obedience and faith to look upon His given providential bronze serpent and live”!¹⁶

⁹ Merrill C. Tenney, “[John](#),” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: John and Acts*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 48.

¹⁰ Gordon J. Wenham, [Numbers: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 4, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1981), 175.

¹¹ Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, [Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible](#), vol. 1 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 110.

¹² James Montgomery Boice, [The Gospel of John: An Expository Commentary](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 221.

¹³ James Montgomery Boice, [The Gospel of John: An Expository Commentary](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 221.

¹⁴ Gordon J. Wenham, [Numbers: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 4, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1981), 176.

¹⁵ Ronald B. Allen, “[Numbers](#),” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990), 877.

¹⁶ Gerard Van Groningen, “[Numbers](#),” in *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*, vol. 3, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1995), 99.

Serpents of Death

The first thing we learn from the above story is how sin leads to death. Israel sinned against God because they found “His way”¹⁷ for their life detestable and worthless!¹⁸ Lest in hindsight we think less of Israel and elevate our own generation we must remember that ever since Adam God has given many over to their reprobate minds (Romans 8:28) because they



craved carnal pleasure¹⁹ to make self and infinite choice their god! Since Israel considered snakes “unclean and personified sin” (Lev. 11:41–42; Gen. 3),²⁰ God rightly sent fiery serpents to punish and bring their sin out into the open. The poison of these venomous snakes was excruciatingly painful²¹ for once it entered the blood it “became like a boiling river, swollen with anguish”²² and was always lethal. Despite knowing that faithful obedience to God led to His approval, blessings, and avoidance of His punishments Israel

still preferred self to be their god. In a similar manner “If we forsake the Lord in spirit or in doctrine, temptation will lurk in our path and sin will sting our feet.”²³ While the sting of sin may lead to temporary, carnal pleasures do not be fooled for the wages of sin is a bite of the serpent, the Devil, that brings about a fiery, death of everlasting punishment “where there shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth!”²⁴ Despite knowing such a fate awaits the defiant, self-pleasing person; like Israel many will live their lives with the carnal pleasures of lust

¹⁷ C. H. Spurgeon, [“Number 1,500, or Lifting up the Brazen Serpent,”](#) in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 25 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1879), 590.

¹⁸ Robert L. Hubbard Jr. and Robert K. Johnston, [“Foreword,”](#) in *Leviticus, Numbers*, ed. W. Ward Gasque, Robert L. Hubbard Jr., and Robert K. Johnston, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012), 262.

¹⁹ C. H. Spurgeon, [“Number 1,500, or Lifting up the Brazen Serpent,”](#) in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 25 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1879), 591.

²⁰ Gordon J. Wenham, [Numbers: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 4, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1981), 177.

²¹ Gordon J. Wenham, [Numbers: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 4, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1981), 176.

²² C. H. Spurgeon, [“Number 1,500, or Lifting up the Brazen Serpent,”](#) in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 25 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1879), 592.

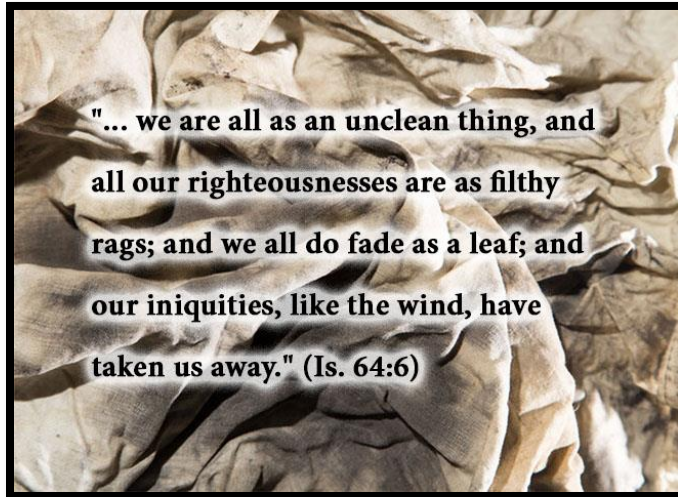
²³ C. H. Spurgeon, [“Number 1,500, or Lifting up the Brazen Serpent,”](#) in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 25 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1879), 591.

²⁴ C. H. Spurgeon, [“Number 1,500, or Lifting up the Brazen Serpent,”](#) in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 25 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1879), 593.

in their eyes knowing full well this unquenchable and eternal pain and anguish will be their reward!

Not by Works

There is no human cure for the fatal disease called sin! There were no healing salves,²⁵ brewing potions, medicines or human doctor that could cure Israel from the fiery snake bites.²⁶ Likewise there is no human cure for sin today because Christianity is not a “works religion.”²⁷



Nicodemus could not find a cure for his separation from God within the Pharisaic teachings and traditions because salvation and the seal of the Holy Spirit cannot be purchased by any human being (Acts 8:18-19)! “You can go to church, read your Bible, take the Lord’s supper, be baptized, go through severe penances, give all your goods to the poor,”²⁸ pray without ceasing for both oneself and others, attempt to fulfill every law God ever gave and yet still have the licks of burning hell consume not only your filthy rags of pretend righteousness but your very soul! Those who are like the Pharisees

and trust their attempt to outwardly obey God through religion will forever remain seekers but not finders of His cure (2 Timothy 3:7)!²⁹ Like the Israelites who were not told to buy some relic of the bronze serpent that Moses impaled on a pole (21:8-9) we too must avoid making a graven image of religious rituals and golden crosses,³⁰ for what truly is a human induced disease has no human cure!³¹ Like Israel the only cure for the self-inflicted fatal wound of sin must come from a sacrifice and atonement that He alone can provide!

²⁵ James Montgomery Boice, [*The Gospel of John: An Expository Commentary*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 222.

²⁶ James Montgomery Boice, [*The Gospel of John: An Expository Commentary*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 222.

²⁷ James Montgomery Boice, [*The Gospel of John: An Expository Commentary*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 220.

²⁸ C. H. Spurgeon, “[Number 1,500, or Lifting up the Brazen Serpent.](#)” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 25 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1879), 597.

²⁹ James Montgomery Boice, [*The Gospel of John: An Expository Commentary*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 222.

³⁰ James Montgomery Boice, [*The Gospel of John: An Expository Commentary*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 224.

³¹ James Montgomery Boice, [*The Gospel of John: An Expository Commentary*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 222.

Salvation Through Christ

The only cure for death is life in Christ. Though it seemed absolutely absurd,³² a form of mockery³³ and possibly even despised,³⁴ the symbol of the very curse Israel endured, the bronze snake, was the only remedy available to appease God's righteous wrath!³⁵ Though their speech



might fail them, their pulse grow weak and death be but a heart beat away; all who looked upon the bronze serpent of Israel lived and those who refused to look died!³⁶ As Moses lifted up the snake impaled on a stake, so too Jesus was lifted up upon a cross.³⁷ To the outward eye the death of a supposed criminal and curse that hung upon the tree,³⁸ Christ, was seen by those dying in their sins to be foolishness (1 Corinthians 1:18) and yet in spite of His "earthly humiliations"³⁹ like the bronze snake of Moses' time, Christ alone was the only

way the curse of the garden of Eden could be reversed and humanity given a chance to obtain eternal life rather than death!⁴⁰ Also, like bronze snake no matter how deeply the poison of sin has penetrated one's life "He who came under the law and sin imputed to Him,⁴¹ has through His sacrifice appeased God's righteous wrath and as such provided the means in which anyone can

³² C. H. Spurgeon, ["Number 1,500, or Lifting up the Brazen Serpent,"](#) in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 25 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1879), 594.

³³ C. H. Spurgeon, ["Number 1,500, or Lifting up the Brazen Serpent,"](#) in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 25 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1879), 594.

³⁴ C. H. Spurgeon, ["The Mysteries of the Brazen Serpent,"](#) in *The New Park Street Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 3 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1857), 368.

³⁵ C. H. Spurgeon, ["Number 1,500, or Lifting up the Brazen Serpent,"](#) in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 25 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1879), 595.

³⁶ C. H. Spurgeon, ["Number 1,500, or Lifting up the Brazen Serpent,"](#) in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 25 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1879), 593.

³⁷ Colin G. Kruse, ["John: An Introduction and Commentary,"](#) vol. 4, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 112–113.

³⁸ Leon Morris, ["The Gospel according to John,"](#) The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 200.

³⁹ Leon Morris, ["The Gospel according to John,"](#) The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 200.

⁴⁰ C. H. Spurgeon, ["Number 1,500, or Lifting up the Brazen Serpent,"](#) in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 25 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1879), 594.

⁴¹ C. H. Spurgeon, ["Number 1,500, or Lifting up the Brazen Serpent,"](#) in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 25 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1879), 594.

be saved!⁴² So, salvation was not for “good” or “religious” people who tried to save themselves through works but instead was out of the wisdom and grace of God⁴³ a free gift to humanity that can either be opened and live or ignored and perish. Salvation is by far the greatest decision a person can ever make for nothing is more valuable than the Pearl and Treasure in the field (Matthew 13:44-46)!

Accepting His Gracious Gift

So, let us go back to Nicodemus’ question of how a person becomes saved. There is no self-help book,⁴⁴ physician, healing balm, medicine, religious ritual,⁴⁵ or intercessory prayer that can lead to obtaining salvation⁴⁶



because to be freed from the wages of sin which is death (Romans 6:23) and be born of the water and Spirit (20:5) requires faith in the atoning sacrifice of God’s very own Son! Despite how deeply entrenched or close to death an Israelite was all they had to do is look upon the bronze serpent to be cured of the poison and live!⁴⁷ Likewise, even if you have the stoniest of black heart of King Manasseh and follow the detestable ways of this world and bow down to the god of self, practice divination and witchcraft (2 Chronicles

33), and even if you are on your death bed with little time left to learn to live a holy life;⁴⁸ this makes no difference for the moment you have faith in Christ and make Him the Lord of your life (Romans 10:9) by the power of the Holy Spirit you will be born again as a child of God, sealed until the day of redemption (Ephesians 1:13-14)! Never forget that “sanctification needs a

⁴² Gordon J. Wenham, *Numbers: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 4, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1981), 178.

⁴³ C. H. Spurgeon, [“Number 1,500, or Lifting up the Brazen Serpent,”](#) in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 25 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1879), 593.

⁴⁴ C. H. Spurgeon, [“Number 1,500, or Lifting up the Brazen Serpent,”](#) in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 25 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1879), 597.

⁴⁵ C. H. Spurgeon, [“Number 1,500, or Lifting up the Brazen Serpent,”](#) in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 25 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1879), 596.

⁴⁶ C. H. Spurgeon, [“Number 1,500, or Lifting up the Brazen Serpent,”](#) in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 25 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1879), 596.

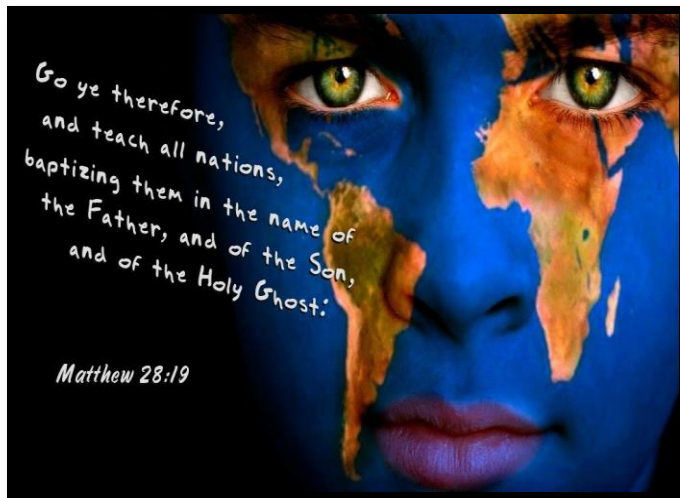
⁴⁷ C. H. Spurgeon, [“Number 1,500, or Lifting up the Brazen Serpent,”](#) in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 25 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1879), 598.

⁴⁸ C. H. Spurgeon, [“The Mysteries of the Brazen Serpent,”](#) in *The New Park Street Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 3 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1857), 371.

lifetime, but justification needs no more than a moment!”⁴⁹ Sadly many will reject God’s gracious gift of salvation and like the Israelites will find no other way to appease God’s righteous wrath against them. So, on Christ’s behalf I implore you though you might be the “vilest wretch on this earth,”⁵⁰ drowning, entangled and choking on your own lust to please whatever god that has enslaved you, repent and believe in Christ’s atoning sacrifice for the moment you do so you will no longer be under a death sentence⁵¹ but one of unspeakable joy and eternal life as God’s very own child (John 3:16)!

Need to Evangelize!

The goal of this sermon was to review Christ’s answer to Nicodemus on how to be saved so that we in turn might go out to the world and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19-20)! May God loosen your fearful hearts and your “stammering tongues” for people are dying



everywhere and you not only know of but can tell and show them by the grace of God the Light that shines so brightly from within your souls (Matthew 5:16)!⁵² And while there will be many whose hearts are like Pharaoh and hardened by their reprobate minds that have drowned in self-seeking, temporal pleasures of this world, there are some out there, whether they realize it or not, with a seed planted in their heart and they just need someone to point them to Christ who can not only help them with their unbelief but give them eternal life that never fades or perishes (1 Peter

1:4)! Surely those who have the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:10-16) and are His ambassadors can take the time to raise the Gospel message of Christ up⁵³ high to a world that has been poisoned by sin and are headed for an eternity in hell where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 13:50)! Let us remember the depths of depravity which we ourselves were

⁴⁹ C. H. Spurgeon, [“Number 1,500, or Lifting up the Brazen Serpent,”](#) in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 25 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1879), 598.

⁵⁰ C. H. Spurgeon, [“The Mysteries of the Brazen Serpent,”](#) in *The New Park Street Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 3 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1857), 372.

⁵¹ C. H. Spurgeon, [“The Mysteries of the Brazen Serpent,”](#) in *The New Park Street Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 3 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1857), 371.

⁵² C. H. Spurgeon, [“The Mysteries of the Brazen Serpent,”](#) in *The New Park Street Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 3 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1857), 369.

⁵³ C. H. Spurgeon, [“Number 1,500, or Lifting up the Brazen Serpent,”](#) in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 25 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1879), 599.

saved and go with rejoicing, thanksgiving and boldness and raise the banner of God's love⁵⁴ to the lost of this world with the profound message that our Savior can not only conquer the mightiest mountains of unbelief but can forgive (Matthew 9:1-8) and transform the worms and dust of the earth so radically that they will be "born again," ambassadors, priests and children of the most high God!

⁵⁴ Marvin Richardson Vincent, [*Word Studies in the New Testament*](#), vol. 2 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1887), 98–99.