

LD 15; Numbers 21:4-9; John 3:9-15; "He Must be Lifted Up" I. The Need Identified II. The Solution Elevated

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, why do churches tend to build high steeples? What is the point of making a high spire that reaches up into the sky? Well, there could be a few reasons. One of them might be that steeples and spires point us up towards the heavens. These spires or towers are designed to remind the community that God should be the focus of your lives. Another reason is so that the church might be seen. The elevated bell-tower serves as a marker- so that others would know exactly where the church is to be found. The spire is elevated to draw people towards it. When you are driving through a new city, you can normally find the closest church by keeping your eyes up and looking at the skyline. Well today we are going to ask ourselves the question- why was it necessary for Jesus to be lifted up? Why must Jesus be put on display-elevated if you will- when He was crucified. We consider this theme: Jesus Christ was lifted up so that all the world may see Him and believe!

I. The Need Identified

As we consider John 3 this morning, we will be considering how Jesus came to fulfill the type and symbol first recorded in Numbers 21. So, to begin, we look at the need which brought about the necessity for Jesus to be lifted up. In other words, why must Jesus be lifted up and nailed to the cross? To answer this question, Jesus points Nicodemus and us back to bronze snake of Numbers 21. The reason that Jesus must be lifted up is the same reason that the snake needed to be lifted up. So what do we learn from Moses in Numbers 21- why was this snake placed on a pole. Well, the reason starts to take shape as we look at the sin that brought the snakes into the camp in the first place. As we read in 21:4- the people grew impatient and they spoke against God and against Moses. They were tired of walking in the wilderness- so close and yet not able to go in. They were tired of the food- this manna is worthless food- we loathe it! So the people were discontent- they sinned against God- they argued and complained- and thus brought about God's anger and wrath. As a consequence of their sins, God sent these fiery serpents

into their midst and many of the people died as v. 6 concludes. Now these snakes were likely the carpet viper which is known to gather in large groups in the desert of the Negev. And once bitten, the people would endure a slow, agonizing death that would sometimes come after 4 days of torture. These snakes are similar in size and color to the copperheads down South. But their presence in the camp was not just a random event, God had sent these poisonous vipers into the camp. This was a direct consequence to their sins- which leads to agony and death. And in using snakes, God would be reminding the Israelites of their own sin and the original sin. As you will remember, Eve sinned by listening to the snake as she grew discontent with the food that God had given to her. And it was in this rebellion to God in the garden that sin, suffering and death had its origin in humanity. So death was coming to those who were bit- the snake was winning the day! So what the Israelites needed in Numbers 21 was a rescue- to be saved from the punishment that they deserved because of their sin- they needed to be set free from death that was coming for them all. And this sets the context in which Jesus says to Nicodemus- so also the Son must be lifted up. The need for deliverance remains the same! Although we have not been bitten by an actual viper- we have a shared condition with the Israelites. We have each sinned- who here has never grumbled and complained? We all have- that is because we have all been bitten by the snake- we all fall short of the glory of God- there is no one righteous! Added to that- we are all one step away from death! We are all dead men walking- our days are short! So why did Jesus need to come? Because every person is a sinner- and death is the consequence of sin! Death has spread to all! But praise God- that is not where our passage ends! Those who had been bitten in Numbers 21 confessed their sins in v. 7- they cry out for mercy- and they prayed for salvation! They do not just go quietly into the night of death- they repent and cry for deliverance! We have sinned they said- we should not have spoken against you- we should not have grumbled- please pray for us! And by God grace, a way out is provided.

Now before we get into the solution, we note that although God does provide a way of escape and life- He does not immediately take away the snakes. Now, we notice two things. God leaves the snakes as He

provides a way of rescue- the sting remains. So the consequences of sin may remain for a time- but there is hope! Death is still around- but it is defeated! And the good news comes by way of a mediated salvation. In other words, God does not just heal them all on the spot. Rather, an object is to be crafted- salvation will be mediated by way of deliverer placed on a pole!

II. The Solution Elevated

So Moses was instructed- make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole. Salvation belongs to the LORD- and it is the LORD who instructs Moses to make this instrument of salvation. Make or craft a snake- of bronze or perhaps brass- and place this snake on a pole. Elevate this crafted snake so that all can see- and to everyone who looks upon this snake- salvation will be given. God graciously provides a way of escape- the possibility of life for those who have sinned. And it comes to pass- everyone who looks on this bronze snake was saved! Now this truth carries over as Jesus is teaching Nicodemus- the Son of Man must be lifted up so that all those who believe in Him may have eternal life! Just as those who looked at the bronze snake would live- so also those who look upon Jesus will live! Now in being elevated, the Son of Man would be put on display. As John 12:32 puts it, When I am lifted up I will draw all people to myself. Jesus said this to indicate which kind of death He was going to die. Jesus would be made a spectacle- for all to see! Jesus was sent by the Father to bring salvation and life for those who were in pain- suffering- and soon to die. In fact, the instrument of suffering is significant. Just as the snake is a sign of God's wrath in Numbers 21- so the cross upon which Jesus would be crucified is a sign of the curse. As John 3:14 puts it- why must Jesus be on a cross? He must be crucified because this kind of death was accursed by God as Gal. 3 says. So the snake in the garden was the object by which death comes- and in our OT reading the snake again brings death. So the cross upon which Jesus would be hung is also an instrument of death. But that is not the end of the story. An evil symbol is going to be turned into an object of salvation- the means by which salvation is going to be received! Our God has a way of turning things around- His ways are not our ways! Think of it- because mankind sinned, we brought death into this

world. We deserve death! But Jesus ends up taking on our curse- dying for us- to secure life for us!

What is a sign of the curse is used to defeat the curse! He was made a curse- so that we might be blessed! So the cross is a sign of death- a sign of the curse- the snake of sin bit us all! Our only hope is to look to the cross. Not the cross alone- but Jesus who was on the cross! Jesus Christ and Him crucified!

That is where we must go- this is where our eyes must gaze! So as those Israelites would look upon the elevated snake, their lives would be spared. So now Jesus says to Nicodemus- whoever believes in Me may have eternal life! In other words- look upon the Son who was on the pole- and you will be saved!

One more application is this- how many options did the Israelites have? Did they have multiple sources of deliverance- could they get a pill from the doctor to counteract the snake bite? No- their only hope was to look to the bronze snake! So it is for us- our only hope- the only way in which we can be saved is if we look to the God ordained savior- the Son of God who was crucified so that we might have life! The word used in John 3 for lifted up has a double meaning- Jesus was literally lifted up as He was nailed to the cross and suspended from the ground. But the other meaning of this word means exalted- lifted up in the sense of being glorified! This word would be applied to Jesus as well- for it is through His crucifixion that He gains the glory- and in saving those who look to Him He gets the praise!

To conclude, back in the garden you will remember that Eve's sin began with a look. She was led astray by a false belief! She looked at the fruit, listened to the snake's words- and believed a lie about God. The solution to this sin is also found in a look- look upon the Son and you will be saved! Believe the truth- trust in His words- and you will have eternal life! Jesus Christ was lifted up so that all the world may see Him and believe! Jesus died in a very public manner- nailed to a pole outside the city gates. But this was so that all might see- and in seeing believe in Him- so that the nations might be gathered and receive eternal life.