

Look and Live

by Rev. Dorothy Bowen Klass

Numbers 21:4-9 (from the Amplified Bible)

⁴ And they journeyed from Mount Hor by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom, and the people became impatient (depressed, much discouraged), because [of the trials] of the way. ⁵ And the people spoke against God and against Moses, Why have you brought us out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no bread, neither is there any water, and we loathe this light (contemptible, unsubstantial) manna. ⁶ Then the Lord sent fiery (burning) serpents among the people; and they bit the people, and many Israelites died. ⁷ And the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against you; pray to the Lord, that He may take away the serpents from us. So Moses prayed for the people. ⁸ And the Lord said to Moses, Make a fiery serpent [of bronze] and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live. ⁹ And Moses made a serpent of bronze and put it on a pole, and if a serpent had bitten any man, when he looked to the serpent of bronze [^[a]attentively, expectantly, with a steady and absorbing gaze], he lived. John 3:14-15 And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert [on a pole], so must [so it is necessary that] the Son of Man be lifted up [on the cross], 15 In order that everyone who believes in Him [who cleaves to Him, trusts Him, and relies on Him] may *not perish, but have eternal life and* [actually] live forever!

Once as I was traveling through a certain state (I probably shouldn't tell you which state it was) I was listening to a radio preacher. The only thing I remember from his sermon was one statement he made. He said, and I quote, "I'm so tired of all this fussin' and this fightin' and this fumigatin'."

I think from our scripture lesson today, God was tired of it too!

God had not only brought the Israelites out of slavery, a major feat in itself, He had taken care of their every need as they traveled in a barren, dry desert year after year. When Pharaoh's army pursued them, they were hemmed in with mountains on both sides and the Red Sea in front of them. But God opened the Red Sea and made a path of escape.

God had given them food and water, guided them day and night, and even kept their clothing and shoes from wearing out. But now, in today's Bible lesson, they are, once again, discouraged, depressed, and impatient. They don't realize that their attitude bespeaks and reveals the rebellion they have in their hearts not just against Moses but against God Himself. Verse 5 says, "The people spoke against God and against Moses....." They were questioning Moses authority and said in so many words, "Why did you bring us out here in this wilderness to die? We are tired of this manna. We hate it. We do not want to live in a barren place like this desert where there is no bread or water. Let's go back to Egypt."

When God heard the complaints and grumbling He was displeased. He sent fiery or burning serpents to bite the people. The words fiery or burning refer figuratively to the burning pain inflicted by the bite of a poisonous serpent. People began dying in pain and agony.

It was only after many people had died that the others finally connected the dots and came to Moses for help. They recognized, then, that they had sinned, not only against Moses, but against God Himself. Verse 7 says "And the people came to Moses, and said, we have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against you; pray to the Lord, that He may take away these serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people.

Moses, the meek and humble man he was, (Numbers 12:3 says he was the meekest man on the earth), prayed for the people. He didn't lecture them, preach to them, reprimand them, or give up on them. He prayed for them.

In answer to his prayer, God told him to make a bronze serpent and put it on a pole. "Everyone who is bitten," God said, "when they look at the serpent, they will live." The Amplified Bible makes it a little clearer. It says "when they look at the serpent of bronze attentively, expectantly, with a steady and absorbing gaze they will live". In other words, they gazed at the bronze serpent expecting to be healed, they had faith that they would be healed.

Can you envision Moses, his beard and robe blowing about him as he trudges up the wind swept mountain side, lifting high the pole with the bronze serpent and shouting, his voice reverberating and echoing down over the mountains "LOOK! IF YOU LOOK...YOU WILL LIVE! LOOK! IF YOU LOOK...YOU WILL LIVE."

I can only imagine what began to happen inside the tents spread around the base of the mountain as the news spread. Immediately there must have been a sense of urgency. "Aminadab, here, quick, help me get your mother to the tent door. Hurry.....this is our ONLY hope." "Grandmother is gone but here can you carry Benjamin out and I'll get Abigail. Look up, look up....look at the serpent on the pole."

Those who believed him and gazed at the serpent were made well. Some may have said, "What a crazy idea Moses has come up with. I don't believe that. How can looking at a bronze serpent help someone who is bitten by a serpent?" And they died. But those who believed and looked at the serpent of bronze attentively, expectantly, and with a steady and absorbing gaze.....they lived!

The story of the Children of Israel wandering in the wilderness is a story all too familiar because it is our story. They had a problem that expressed itself over and over. The problem was not the complaining, the problem was not the murmuring, those were just symptoms of the problem.

They were in rebellion against God but even the rebellion was not the root cause. The root cause of the problem of the children of Israel is the same root cause that every one of us is born with, and that we can do nothing to remove. We have all been bitten by the serpent of sin. We are all born with a sin nature that we are powerless to rid ourselves of. Romans 5:12 says "through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned:"

Immediately upon Adam's sin, the door of communication with God was locked, yea, chained up, and no more coming nigh the Lord: not a soul could have access to Him, either in a way of communion in this world, or of enjoyment in that to come. It was Jesus the Mediator that opened that door again, and in Him it is that we have boldness, and access with confidence.

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So around 1500 years later, as Jesus is in a conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus refers to story of Moses and the Bronze Serpent. And Jesus says an incredible thing in John 3:14 and 15, "...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."

Jesus was foretelling his own death and the salvation that would result for those who trusted and believed in him.

II Corinthians 5:21 says "For he (God) hath made him (Jesus) to be sin for us, (God made Jesus to be sin for us) who knew no sin that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."

Jesus Christ actually became sin for us. Jesus, God in the flesh, He who was tempted in all points as we are and yet never sinned but lived a spotless, sinless life. He took on Himself all the sins that every person would sin. That is a lot of sin. That is why he compared himself to a serpent. The serpent represented sin and he took all of our sins and our sin nature and endured separation from God as He died in unspeakable pain on the cross. The pain of His physical suffering was eclipsed by the emotional pain of separation from His Father from whom He had never been separated. That is why He cried out on the cross, “MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?” Sin separated Him from His Father and sin separates us from our Father.

Nothing has the power to cure us of the bite of sin except FAITH in the blood of Christ. Just as the Israelites looked to the bronze serpent and lived so we must look to Christ for spiritual life.

We can work hard, give our life for others and do good works in our church and community. But there is no way we can be healed from the poisonous bite of sin unless we look to the sacrifice Jesus made on Calvary in order to forgive us of our sins. If you look to Jesus Christ, if you trust and rely on Him you will live.

Isaiah 45:22 says “Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.”

The Pulpit Commentary says and I quote “Look unto Me....and not to idols, nor to any creature, nor to the works of your hands; nor to your own righteousness;all must be looked away from, and Christ only looked unto by a direct act of faith, for righteousness, and for pardon.....He is to be looked unto as the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world; as the only Mediator between God and man, as the Savior and Redeemer of lost sinners.....for none ever look to him and are ashamed or disappointed.”

The snow was very deep and blizzard-like conditions existed in England on January 6, 1850. It was a Sunday morning. A young man, not quite 16 years old, was trying to walk to church. He was full of despair, feeling far away from God. It seemed he could not find help although he had visited several different churches.

Here is his story in his own words: “I sometimes think I might have been in darkness and despair until now had it not been for the goodness of God in sending a snowstorm, one Sunday morning, while I was going to a certain place of worship. When I could go no further, I turned down a side street, and came to a little Primitive Methodist chapel. In that chapel there may have been a dozen or fifteen people. . . . The minister did not come that morning; he was snowed up, I suppose. At last, a very thin-looking man, a shoemaker, or tailor, or something of that sort, went up into the pulpit to preach. . . .He was obliged to stick to his text, for the simple reason that he had little else to say. The text was “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth [Isaiah 45:22].”

He did not even pronounce the words rightly, but that did not matter. There was, I thought, a glimpse of hope for me in that text. The preacher began thus: “My dear friends, this is a very simple text indeed. It says, ‘Look.’ Now lookin’ don’t take a deal of pain. It ain’t liftin’ your foot or your finger; it is just, ‘Look.’ Well, a man needn’t go to college to learn to look. You may be the biggest fool, and yet you can look. A man needn’t be worth a thousand a year to be able to look. Anyone can look; even a child can look.

“But then the text says, ‘Look unto Me’. . . Many of ye are lookin’ to yourselves, but it’s no use lookin’ there. Ye will never find any comfort in yourselves. Some look to God the father. No, look to him by-and-by. Jesus Christ says, ‘Look unto Me.’ Some of ye say, ‘We must wait for the Spirit’s workin’.’ You have no business with that just now. Look to Christ. The text says, ‘Look unto Me.’”

Then the good man followed up his text in this way: “Look unto Me; I am sweatin’ great drops of blood. Look unto Me; I am hangin’ on the cross. Look unto Me; I am dead and buried. Look unto

Me; I rise again. Look unto Me; I ascend to heaven. Look unto Me; I am sittin' at the Father's right hand. O poor sinner, look unto Me! Look unto Me!"

When he had gone to about that length, and managed to spin out ten minutes or so he was at the end of his tether. Then he looked at me under the gallery, and I dare say, with so few present he knew me to be a stranger. Just fixing his eyes on me, as if he knew all my heart he said, "Young man, you look very miserable." Well, I did, but I had not been accustomed to have remarks made from the pulpit on my personal appearance before. However, it was a good blow, struck right home. He continued, "and you always will be miserable—miserable in life, and miserable in death—if you don't obey my text; but if you obey now, this moment, you will be saved."

Then lifting up his hands, he shouted, as only a primitive Methodist could do, "Young man, look to Jesus Christ. Look! Look! Look! You have nothing to do but to look and live." I saw at once the way of salvation. I know not what else he said—I did not take much notice of it—I was so possessed with that one thought. *Like as when the brazen serpent was lifted up, the people only looked and were healed*, so it was with me. I had been waiting to do fifty things, but when I heard that word, "Look!" What a charming word it seemed to me! Oh! I looked until I could have almost looked my eyes away.

There and then the cloud was gone, the darkness had rolled away, and that moment I saw the sun; and I could have risen that instant, and sung with the most enthusiastic of them, of the precious blood of Christ, and the simple faith which looks alone to him. . . ."

The young man, who came to Christ that day and looked to the Lamb of God for salvation, was none other than the famous Charles Haddon Spurgeon. At age 19 he became the pastor of the largest church in England and it is estimated that in his short lifetime of 57 years, he preached to ten million people.

What a simple message Spurgeon heard that day. And the message of Christ is a simple message. Look to Me. Not a passing glance but an attentive, expectant, steady and absorbing gaze. Why should we look to Christ? For healing of the soul from sin. Just as the Israelites were bitten by snakes when they rebelled, so we have been "bitten" with the sting of sin. We are all born sinners. Because we are born with a "sin nature" we sin. Perhaps we don't love our neighbor, maybe we cheat on our taxes or tell convenient lies. The cheating, lying, and lack of love are not the problem, they are symptoms of the problem. The problem is sin.

Just as the bronze serpent was the only means of life for those who had been bitten by a poisonous snake, so Jesus Christ is the only means of spiritual life for all mankind. We are dead spiritually and will continue to be dead spiritually until we look to Jesus and trust Him for eternal life.

1 Timothy 2:5: For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus....

Peter said in Acts 4:12 ¹² And there is salvation in *and* through no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by *and* in which we must be saved.

So how should we look? We should look with an intense faith-filled believing gaze.

When should we look? II Corinthians 6:2 says....Today is the day of salvation.

If you have not looked to Christ for freedom from your sin, I would challenge you today, to do as Charles Spurgeon did on that snowy day some 150 years ago. To look at Christ with an attentive, steady gaze, believing and trusting in His death that you may know that you have eternal life. Look and live!!!