Behold the Man

Numbers 21:4-9
4 And they journeyed from mount Hor by the way of the Red sea, to compass the land of Edom: and the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way.
5 And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread.
6 And the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died.
7 Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord, and against thee; pray unto the Lord, that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people.
8 And the Lord said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live.
9 And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.

John 3:14-16
14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up:
15 That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.
16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

The murmuring in the wilderness.
• I have often been intrigued by the language of Numbers 21:4.
  o The Hebrews are on a journey
    ▪ from bondage to deliverance,
    ▪ from slavery to freedom.
  o They have left behind the taskmaster’s whips
    ▪ and they are on their way to possess a land
    ▪ that was promised to their father Abraham.
  o They are in the middle of a miraculous story.
    ▪ It began in bondage,
      ▪ but it is destined to end in blessing.
    ▪ It started with hardship
      ▪ but it will conclude with the miraculous provision of God.
  o From their humble occupation as slaves
    ▪ they are now destined
      ▪ to possess homes they did not build
      ▪ and reap from fields they did not plant.
• But, in spite of the grand testimony
of the power and provision of God,
  • the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way.

  • I don't want to get bogged down here,
    0 but it amazes me how quickly
      ▪ they forget the deliverance of God.
    0 It astounds me how quickly they forget the promises of God.

  • The journey from bondage to blessing
    0 passes through some rough patches
      ▪ and, all of a sudden,
      ▪ they are ready to go back to being slaves.

  • The promises of future blessing
    0 are not substantial enough, in their eyes,
      ▪ to tolerate their current discomfort.
    0 Somehow, the here and now,
      ▪ completely distracts them from their destination
        • and they begin to lament the very fact
        • that they have left Egypt.

  • I believe that their double mindedness is a faithful representation
    0 of the frail human nature that governs us all.
      ▪ They quickly lose sight of the destination
      ▪ and get bogged down in the journey.

  • But worse than that
    0 they come to the terrible conclusion
      ▪ that they would rather go back
        • to the certainty of a life of bondage, in Egypt,
    0 than to face the relative uncertainty
      ▪ of walking by faith with God
        • through the wilderness of this life.

  • It must be difficult to find anything good
    0 about a life of bondage and slavery
      ▪ but somehow they manage to think
        • of that former life as having been better
          0 than their present situation.

  • What an incredible testimony
    0 to the shortsightedness of our vision.
      ▪ We can quickly condemn those foolish Hebrews
        • but how many of us have, at some time or another,
          0 been willing to sacrifice the eternal
          0 for the temporary?
      ▪ For an instant’s pleasure,
      ▪ for a momentary reward,
        • we foolishly pursue the desires of our flesh
        • to the detriment of our souls.

  • In this case, they began to speak against God and Moses.
In their foolishness they began to bring
  - false accusations against God and his man.

- Perhaps, at first they were hesitant
  - but, when sudden judgment didn’t come,
    - their discontentment caused them to
      - become even more blatant
        - in their mumblings
        - and complaining against God.
  - They began to see the very blessings of God as a curse.
    - They began to see the very provision of God as a thing to be scorned.
      - Before long they were vehemently venting
        - their frustrations against God and Moses
        - and their discontentment
          - with their present circumstances.

The fiery serpents.
- What happened next is something that they never anticipated.
  - One of them, in the midst of their passionate tirade,
    - was bitten by a dangerous serpent
      - and immediately became sick unto death.
  - To the others, though, the isolated tragedy
    - was not enough to stem the tide of their displeasure.
  - But then another serpent bit another Hebrew
    - and another and another and another.
  - All of a sudden there was an infestation
    - of fiery serpents in their camp.
  - Everywhere they turned,
    - everywhere they walked
      - these serpents were everywhere.
  - They were coming out of the crevices between the rocks,
    - under the flaps of their tents,
      - crawling out of their cook pots.
  - And their bite was terribly deadly.
    - Just one bite was all it took.
      - Just one exposure to that terrible venom was enough
        - to cause a man or woman
        - to fall violently ill.
- It was their discontentment that caused the judgment of God to be turned loose,
  - and the serpents provided a very real illustration
    - of the deadly nature of their discontentment.
- The sting of sin and death
  - comes from a discontentment
    - with the goodness of God.
• Think about it for a moment.
  o The original sin, in the garden,
    ▪ was based on discontentment
      • with the provision of God.
  o God had provided for Adam and Eve's every need
    ▪ but, somehow, they became convinced
      • that God had kept some good thing from them.
  o Adam and Eve partake of the fruit
    ▪ out of a sense of conviction
      • that there is some good thing
        o that God has withheld from them.
  o At the heart of it they failed to be content
    ▪ with all that God had already given to them.
• All sin follows the pattern of that original sin.
  o Sin originates in doubt.
    ▪ We doubt God.
    ▪ We doubt his word.
    ▪ We doubt his provision.
    ▪ We doubt his purpose for our lives.
      • All sin springs from doubting God
• And sin, once it is loosed in our lives,
  o is a deadly poison
    ▪ that is never limited
      • to the particular area
        o of discontentment that gave rise to it.
  o Adam and Eve discovered
    ▪ that sin had consequences
      • that went far beyond what they intended.
  o Likewise the Hebrews were quick to learn
    ▪ that their murmuring against God and Moses
      • had consequences far more deadly
        o than they had ever anticipated.

The Serpent's bite.
• I don't know how long it took,
  o but eventually the serpent's bite,
    ▪ and its adverse affect,
      • caused the Hebrews to become aware of their sin.
  o They realized the dreadful mistake that they had made.
    ▪ Somehow they came to understand
      • that this infestation of deadly serpents
        o was the result of the judgment of God
          ▪ for their discontentment
          ▪ with the blessings
          ▪ and provision of God.
Having seen the wrath of God,
  • having experienced the judgment of God,
    ▪ watching their loved ones and family members
      o stricken dead by the serpent’s bite,
    ▪ they quickly began to realize
      o that they needed the mercy of God!
  • So they came to Moses, in verse 7 and said, “We have sinned.”
    ▪ We realize that we have done wrong
      • and we understand that we cannot save ourselves.
  • In a move of submission,
    ▪ not just to God but to Moses also,
      • they asked Moses to pray to God on their behalf.
  • They recognized that they were at the mercy of God
    ▪ and that they need the man of God in their lives.
      ▪ So they humbled themselves
        o and came to God seeking mercy.
  • That was all that God was waiting for.
    ▪ God only wanted them to realize their need for him.
      ▪ Once they came to that conclusion,
        • their need was all the invitation
          o that God’s mercy and grace was waiting for!
          o That is all it took.
    ▪ God would move miraculously on their behalf,
      ▪ once they recognized the fact
        • that they needed him to do so!
      ▪ When Israel recognized their sin,
        • God’s mercy was the answer.

The Mercy of God.
  • What is so intriguing here is the avenue by which the mercy of God flows.
    ▪ The serpents were the instruments of God’s wrath against their sin
      • but it was the image of a serpent
        ▪ that became the channel through which
          • the blessings of God’s mercy flowed.
    ▪ God told Moses
      ▪ to make the image of a serpent
        • and put it on a pole
      ▪ and when that image of a serpent was lifted up
        • in the sight of the people,
          • the mercy of God flowed through it.
  • There is an incredible parallel here to the cross.
    ▪ Calvary is the image of God’s wrath.
      ▪ Calvary is a representation of the horrific nature
        • of the wrath of God against sin.
    ▪ The absolute horror of sin is made obvious
in the absolute terror of God’s judgment.
  • It is an image of the wrath of God.
  • But it is not just an image of the wrath of God.
    o It is also an image of the love of God.
• When Moses lifted up that serpent on a stick
  o he was not just reminding the Hebrews of God’s judgment,
    • he was declaring to them God’s love.
  o God, through his mercy, made a way for their deliverance.
    • The same God that they were murmuring against;
      • the same God that they were discontented with;
      • the same God that they had falsely accused,
        o has now, by miraculous means,
          • made a way of deliverance for them.
  o Once again, the parallel to the cross is evident.
    • The wages of sin is death,
      • but God was made a little lower than the angels
        o in order to taste of death for every man!
    • At the cross, we see the wrath of God,
      • but we also see the unmitigated love of God.
  o He loves us that much!
    • It was the incredible love of God
      • that compelled him to the Cross.

The Son of Man Lifted Up.
• In John chapter 3, Jesus makes the connection
  o between the serpent in the wilderness
  o and the cross.
• He said:

John 3:14
14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up:
15 That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.
16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

• We tend to focus on the great love of God
  o but that wasn’t the real point of what Jesus was saying.
• He was making the connection to the serpent in the wilderness
  o and the fact that,
    • in order for deliverance to come,
      • the serpent had to be lifted up.
  o Likewise, Jesus had to go to the cross,
    • the wrath of God had to be put on display,
      • the Son of man must be lifted up!
• This is why he came.
  o So that he could make a way for mercy to flow.
  o So that the world could see the great wrath of God
    ▪ poured out on that fleshly body
    ▪ that was nothing less than God
    ▪ robed in the flesh,
  ▪ and that, in the spectacle of the cross,
    ▪ we would find eternal life.
• Faith springs from the cross.
  o If God went to such great lengths to save the lost,
    ▪ If God was willing to go so far
      ▪ as to robe himself in flesh
      ▪ and suffer death for every man,
    ▪ then every person kind find hope
      ▪ at the cross.
  o That’s the message of the cross.
    ▪ If he loved me that much,
      ▪ then surely I can be set free
      ▪ from the bondage of sin.
    ▪ If God cared enough
      ▪ to make a way where there seemed to be no way
    ▪ then how can I ever be denied?
  o The wonder of the cross is that it gives rise to faith
    ▪ in the love, mercy and grace of God.
  o We find the resources to believe God’s promise
    ▪ in the great price that God has paid
      ▪ so that we can be set free.
    ▪ Faith springs from the cross.
• Likewise, obedience to the gospel springs from faith.
  o Faith isn’t really faith until it results in action!
    ▪ Faith without works is dead,
      ▪ it is not faith at all.
  o Real faith works.
    ▪ Faith compels the sinner to repentance.
      ▪ Faith inspires the sinner to go get baptized
        ▪ in the name of Jesus.
    ▪ Faith results in the glorious infilling of the Holy Ghost.
  o It all springs from faith,
    ▪ which is birthed in our hearts
      ▪ by an encounter with the cross.
  o When we look upon the cross,
    ▪ we are challenged to believe
• that God can save us.
  ▪ And that faith compels us
  • to obey the gospel message of salvation.

Look To Live.
• Let’s go back to the wilderness for just a moment.
  o In order for the Hebrews to be saved
    ▪ from the judgment of God,
  o they had to look upon the image
    ▪ of the fiery serpent
  o that Moses had lifted up
    ▪ in the presence of the people.
    • **When they beheld the serpent they lived.**
  o The answer to their dilemma was to be had by looking at the serpent.
    ▪ They didn't look to their friends for help,
      ▪ their friends couldn't do them any good.
    ▪ They didn’t look at their wounds,
      ▪ dwelling on the snake bite itself would not save them.
    ▪ The didn’t look to themselves for the answer,
      ▪ they were absolutely powerless to heal themselves.
    ▪ They didn't look to the wisdom of the world,
      ▪ all of man’s vain philosophies couldn’t save them.
  • They had to look at the brazen serpent.
    ▪ That is where their only hope was.
      ▪ There was no use in looking anywhere else.
    ▪ The only thing that could save them
      ▪ was the image of a serpent on the stick
        ▪ that Moses held up.
  • Every one that is bitten **WHEN** he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.
    ▪ The only answer was God's answer
      ▪ There was no other way!
      ▪ There was no other solution.
      ▪ There were no other options.
        • If they wanted to live,
          ▪ they had to look upon the serpent.
  • The same is true of the cross.
    ▪ The death, burial and resurrection
      ▪ is the only means of salvation
        ▪ from a world of sin.
    ▪ There is no other way.
      ▪ Nothing else can save us.
  • **We must look to the cross.**
    ▪ We must look upon an empty tomb.
    ▪ We must behold a risen savior!
      ▪ Looking upon the ordinances of men will not save us.
Looking to religious institutions will not save us.
Looking to vain traditions will not save us.
  • The government is no help.
  • The philosophy and wisdom of man is no help.
  • The pop psychology of our day can’t solve the sin problem.
  • All the education in the world won’t fix it.

• Jesus Christ is our only hope!
  o From the cross, flows the blood of Jesus.
    ▪ Mercy, forgiveness and deliverance are found at the cross.
      • The efficacy of repentance is in the cross.
      • The efficacy of baptism is in his burial.
      • The efficacy of the infilling of the Holy Ghost is in his resurrection.
  o If you want to be saved from your sins
    ▪ you have no other recourse than the cross.
      • It is your only hope.

We Must Lift Jesus Up.
• Now, let me bring this home for a minute.
  o In essence, the salvation of the whole nation
    ▪ was in the hands of Moses.
• In order for the plague of the serpents to be stopped,
  o in order for judgment to come to an end,
    ▪ in order for the Hebrews to be saved,
      • Moses had to lift up the brazen serpent.
  o He had to get out of his tent
    ▪ and get out there among the people.
  o He had to go walk where the serpents were,
    ▪ he had to go out into that dangerous place
      • and lift up the image of a serpent on a pole.
• The only way the Hebrews could be saved
  o was to look upon the brazen serpent.
• The only way they could look upon it
  o was if Moses lifted it up.
• I have to imagine that he went to some high point in the camp,
  o and he lifted that brazen serpent as high as he could
    ▪ so that as many people as possible
      • from as far away as necessary,
      • could see the image on the stick.
• This is where the application of the story is in John 3:14.

14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up:
**Somebody has to lift Jesus up!**

- In order for sinners to find salvation
  - Jesus must be lifted up in our lives.
  - Even so MUST the Son of Man be lifted up!
- That brazen serpent didn’t do any good,
  - if it was hidden away somewhere.
    - It did no good if those who needed it couldn’t see it.
    - It would never accomplish its purpose
      - until somebody lifted it up!
- This world needs Jesus!
  - This world needs the hope and the promise of the cross!
    - But they will never get it
    - unless somebody lifts up Jesus in their life.
- Somebody has to show them the cross.
  - Somebody has to tell them of the marvelous mercy of God.
  - Somebody has to demonstrate for them the love of God.
- If we want to have revival, then we must lift Jesus up!
  - If we want to reach our world,
    - then we must lift Jesus up.
  - How will they know if we don’t tell them?
    - How will they hear if we don’t preach it?
      - Somebody must lift Jesus up.
  - That is your calling.
    - That is your purpose in life.
      - God saved you from this world of sin,
        - so you could put the cross 
          - on display in your life.
      - So that others might see the glory of God
        - on display in your life.
      - So that others might hear the gospel message
        - from your lips.
  - We must lift Jesus up.

Close: **Behold The Man**

- Pilate never understood what he was doing.
  - He never understood the importance of his words:
    - But his invitation to the crowd the day of the crucifixion
    - May well have been the invitation of heaven:

**John 19:5**

5 Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe. And Pilate saith unto them, **Behold the man!**

- Pilate’s invitation needs to be the invitation of the church to the world!
  - Look upon the mercy of God!
• Let me lead you to the cross!
  o Behold the man, Christ Jesus.
    ▪ Look full upon the wondrous mercy of God!
  o His death, his burial, his resurrection
    ▪ Is the only hope for a lost world!
  o Now, more than ever before,
    ▪ we need to be witnesses of the cross.
  o Now more than ever before
    ▪ we need to share this message of hope and love.
  o Now more than ever before
    ▪ the world needs to know about God and his love.

• The gospel is all about the cross.
  o It is all about the death, burial and resurrection.
    ▪ We, who have been the recipients of God’s mercy
      • must share that mercy with our world.
    ▪ Even so must the Son of man be lifted up!

• I want to challenge you this evening to be an evangelist of the cross.
  o I want to challenge you to share this message with someone this week.

• Tell somebody about the love of God.
  o Tell somebody about the mercy of God.
    ▪ Lift Jesus up.
    ▪ Lift up the cross.
  o Help someone see the great love of God.
    ▪ That is what it takes to have revival
    ▪ and that is what it takes to reach our world.

• I’m asking you to come and pray
  o and ask God to lay on your heart
    ▪ the name of one individual.

• One person in your world that you can reach out to this week.
  o One person that my never see the great love of God
    ▪ if you fail to lift up the cross.

• And I want you to commit, this week,
  o to reach out to that one person!