

# Look On Him and Live!

The confusion was driving him nuts. His whole life had been spent pursuing the wisdom of the elders and the knowledge of the scriptures. He knew the traditions better than most Pharisees. In fact, he was known as the teacher of Israel. And for most of his life, he'd been quite confident about his knowledge.

But then came this itinerant rabbi doing these truly amazing signs. He gave sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, new limbs to the lame. Demons even fled at his word. Yet it was his word that troubled Nicodemus. His teachings confused him for though the signs were undoubtedly from God, his words didn't seem to jive with the traditions of the elders.

And so, here he was, approaching the 'light' under cover of darkness. As he neared, he came to Jesus with sincere desire and doubt.

*"Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."*

But Jesus knew immediately the source of Nic's dilemma. And John presented it in his gospel because the poor Pharisee is not alone. We can all wear his sandals so to speak. Most of us at some time or another get caught in the same mess.

*Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."*

Jesus is the fullness of the expression of God's Kingdom for He

is the King and all the promises of God in Him are yes and amen. To see Jesus for who He is, is to see the Kingdom. However, Nic was more confused than ever. He said, *"How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"*

*Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'"*

Now, to 'marvel' comes from the word meaning to look at. Jesus was telling Nicodemus that he was caught up in a skewed analysis – looking at the wrong thing. Consequently, his carnal or logical mind was befuddled.

Jesus continued, *"The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."*

He was saying, 'You hear the sound of my words but you don't know 'where I'm coming from' or 'where I'm going with this.' I am of the Spirit and what I'm saying is of the Spirit. If you're going to 'get it' you'll have to be radically changed – born again spiritually. And for that to happen, you'll have to look at the right thing.'

*Nicodemus answered and said to Him, "How can these things be?"*

He was still tunneled into the 'how' and not the 'Who'. *Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things? Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know*

*and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?"*

Now, Christ was leading him along the path of discovery. When He said, "We speak what We know..." it is more appropriately translated, "We speak of what We see with awareness and consider." And when He followed with, "...and testify what We have seen" it means, "and bear witness to what We've stared at and discerned clearly, what we've experienced as a consequence."

He said, 'What I've told you is earthly and you don't believe. How are you going to receive the heavenly?' For example, *"No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven."* Now, some commentators proposed that this is a retrospective insert by the Apostle. I don't buy that. It's a statement that is completely in the flow if you would of His instruction. Heaven, is a totally different dimension. Time is quite different there. Past, present and future are wrapped in the eternal now. Surely, this was a mind bender for Nicodemus. It is for me.

But graciously, Jesus gave him more to consider – something, he should have been able to relate to a little better. *"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."*

To track with Jesus (and Nic), we must turn to the Old Testament book of Numbers. In chapter 21, it was near the conclusion of their

wilderness wanderings but the Hebrew people were quite down. Miriam had died; Aaron died, they'd been 'molested' on one side by a small army of Canaanites and the Edomites on the other side refused to grant them passage to their destination on the Kings Highway. It probably seemed like the whole world was against them.

And even though God had given them manna to eat, fresh water from the Rock to drink and their sandals had never worn out – miraculous provision – nevertheless, they were really bummed! As they journeyed around Edom, *"the soul of the people became very discouraged."* (or literally, cut down like grass).

*"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."* (Num 21:5)

You might say they'd been outcasts from the 'world community' their whole lives. After wandering in the wilderness for so long, they even came to disdain the miraculous manna. It was the 'time of the end' – the end of their wanderings, but they didn't know it. They'd seen God's hand at work in the defeat of the Canaanites, but their hearts were hardened. They complained that there was no food or water which was a blatant misrepresentation. They were simply ignoring the truth of God's gracious protection and provision. They'd even driven Moses to strike the Rock (rather than speak to it) in anger and frustration... There's

only one way to deal with hard, contentious hearts...

"So the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died." (v6) Now, the word serpent in this verse is implied. The actual Hebrew term is 'seraph' which simply means fiery and thus leads most to conclude that these creatures inflicted a burning poison with their bite. This word seraph though is also used in Isaiah chapter six to describe heavenly beings about the throne of God. Again, the emphasis is upon their fiery appearance or nature.

You see, this passage in Numbers 21 is both practical and prophetic concerning belief in Christ and fire sent from heaven is the key in each case. Practically, the Jews had become so hard hearted to the Lord that they needed a fiery affliction to break through their dullness and cynicism. More than judgment, this was a merciful 'wake-up call' from God. In their deplorable spiritual condition, there was no way for them to enter the promised land yet they were on the threshold, approaching the fulfillment of the inheritance.

The bites of these fiery serpents were a physical manifestation of Israel's spiritual environment and condition. Now, interestingly enough, this word for bite also means to onerously oppress with a debt and this is picture perfect. You see, in a similar fashion sin has bitten us all. It has poisoned all mankind with an unholy flame. As a consequence, we are also overwhelmingly in debt – obligated to it and to Satan, utterly oppressed.

*"Therefore 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 take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people." (v7) It is fundamental that if we are to be born again, the fiery bite of sin must be recognized and dealt with. We must understand that we've been 'bitten' and without a remedy, we will indeed die.*

*"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." (v8,9) Contrary to the people's petition, God did not remove the fiery beasts but instead provided a cure. Neither, has He removed sin from our existence, but He has provided the perfect prescription – the pole.*

God told Moses to make an image of the fiery creatures and set it on a pole. This is a terrible/wonderful picture of our Lord Jesus Christ. He was likewise placed upon a pole – the cross of Calvary. And as Moses made the serpent out of bronze – the metal of judgment – so God laid on Christ the judgment for all our sins, all our poison, all our fiery bites.

2 Corinthians 5:21 says, *"For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."* That is, Jesus became the bronze serpent upon the pole if you would – not a sinner but rather sin. He

carried the entire debt for us all.

And the people were healed by looking at the image on the pole. This verb in the Hebrew does not mean a passing glance but instead to *approve, consider, discern, enjoy, have experience, take heed, respect, regard with pleasure, look intently.* (Strong's) That means you won't see what Christ did for you unless you really look at Him and His sacrifice in this fashion. It needs to sink in. That's where the healing is found.

John recorded this teaching early in his gospel because if we are to believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior, we must come to the cross and FIX our gaze on the One who is upon it – to ponder, discern, recognize and appreciate. We can't stamp out the serpents. If we pretend they don't exist or call them by another name, we'll die from their bite. We can't always avoid them, but we can come to the pole – to the cross.

Prophetically, this passage speaks of and to the Jewish people. Spiritually, they have wandered in a dry and desolate wilderness for nearly two millennia. They have suffered great persecution, but God has provided for them in just amazing ways. Nevertheless, they have as a whole come to disdain their God. Some research indicates that up to 90% of the Jews in Israel itself are either agnostics or atheists. Consequently, those in the religious minority are considered extremists.

And as with the story in Numbers, they are approaching the end, the end of the age. Once again, fire is in their future. To them, the Word says,

*"See, the LORD is coming with fire, and his chariots are like a whirlwind; he will bring down his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire." (Isa 66:15)*

*"In the whole land," declares the LORD, "two-thirds (of the Jewish people) will be struck down and perish; yet one-third will be left in it. This third I will bring into the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, 'They are my people,' and they will say, 'The LORD is our God.'" (Zech 13:8-10)*

*"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you." (Isa 43:2)*

The soon coming time of tribulation will be filled with fire, and as with Moses, the Jews who would be saved out this great trial will have to **look** upon the One whom they 'pierced' – the One upon the cross. As the scripture records, *"And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will **look on Me** whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn."* (Zech 12:10) So shall the remnant of Israel be healed from sin, saved by grace.

Friend, like Nicodemus and me, you've been bitten. What will you do about it? Do nothing and you will die. There's only one cure. Consider Jesus Christ. Look on Him and live!