

THE SON OF MAN SHALL BE LIFTED UP

JOHN 3:14-15 • TV-036B

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John 3:14-15

“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up. That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.”

Will you take your Bible and open it to the book of **John chapter 3?**

Now my subject today will be: **“THE SON OF MAN LIFTED UP.”**

My text will be **verse 14-15 of John 3:** *“As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so, must the son of man be lifted up that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”*

Now, Nicodemus to whom our Lord spoke these words, Nicodemus was a grown man; he was a mature man and he was a religious leader. Nicodemus was a teacher of the Scriptures. He considered himself a scholar.

But Nicodemus, though a grown man, though a teacher of the Scriptures, was but a child in the things of God. He was but a child in understanding.

And when our Lord would teach this man the truth of redemption and the truth of grace He used metaphors and He used pictures. He used figures of familiar things, simple illustrations to illustrate or to preach profound truth.

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You know, when I think about that, I think of this; oh that we today would climb down out of our intellectual ivy towers, out of our theological, lofty antics, and come down where the people are and begin to preach to them in the language of the common man using pictures, illustrations, Scriptures, and metaphors that at least in their heads people will know what we're talking about.

Let me show you some examples. Look there in the book of **John chapter 3**. Now, our Lord is teaching Nicodemus about the new birth. Now you'll want to listen to this.

Ever since our President, Jimmy Carter, has talked about being born again, experiencing the new birth, people have made light of this phrase. They've made light of this statement, "Born again, Christians, born again."

What does it mean? Well, when our Lord would illustrate this to Nicodemus; this is what He said in **verses 3-5**, when a man is born the first time of his mother and father he's born of the flesh. He's born a natural person, a natural man. And he's born with natural understanding. He can understand material, physical things, because he is a natural, fleshly, physical individual.

In order to have spiritual life, in order to have spiritual understanding of God, of His world, of His kingdom, of His Word, of His grace, a person needs a new birth. That's what our Lord is saying. "*Except a man is born again he cannot see*" and that word "*see*" is understand.

If you're teaching a child something and he says, "Now how do you do this?" You say, "Well you do it this way, do you see, and do you see?" You say, "Do you understand? Do you discern what I'm saying?"

And this is what the Lord is saying. Paul said, "*A natural man receiveth not the things of God; they're foolishness to him. Neither can he know them; they're spiritually understood* (he's not spiritually alive. He's spiritually dead). *You hath He quickened who were dead in trespasses and sin.*"

So I'm not surprised at all when I pick up an editorial page and see a cartoonist, a natural man who has drawn a cartoon to make fun of a born again President Carter. I can see how he would make fun of that because he is a natural man, "*The natural man receiveth not the things of God,*" (of His kingdom, of His grace, and of His Son). They are what? "*They are foolishness to him.*"

And then our Lord went on and He says; "Now this new birth, by which a man receives spiritual life; now you have physical life, you can hear these words, you may not understand them but you can hear them."

If I was talking about mathematics you would understand them because you're a natural man and 2 and 2 equals 4 in the natural realm. If I were talking about how to build an airplane, if I were talking about how to build an automobile or how to wire a house, you would understand that because that's fleshly, that's real. Touch the wires and you'll find out its real.

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But when we talk about the kingdom of God and the purpose of God and the grace of God, in order to understand that you've got to have what you don't have and that's spiritual life. That's what we lost in Adam.

God said; "*Adam, when you eat the forbidden fruit you'll die.*" And that's what he did, he died. He died spiritually, and death, spiritual death passed upon all men.

And then our Lord said this; "*This new birth, (this born again, of which people make fun and ridicule) this new birth is by the Spirit of God.*" Read **John 1:12-13**; "*It is not of the will of the flesh.*" A man cannot born himself spiritually anymore that he can born himself physically. "*It's not of the will of the flesh.*" You cannot by willing receive the new birth.

"*It's not of him that runneth or of him that willeth; it is of God that showeth mercy.*" That's what Christ said. This new birth, born of water and of the Spirit, born from above, just like it takes a natural father to plant a natural seed to bring forth a natural son; it takes the power of God, the spiritual Father, to plant the spiritual seed which is the Word of God to bring forth a spiritual son or daughter.

"*It's not of the will of the flesh. It's not of the will of man.*" In other words, you can't regenerate another person. No sir, there is no way that you can regenerate another person. You can't save anybody else's soul.

You cannot put spiritual life in anyone else. "*It's not of blood,*" that is, it is not handed down from father to son. The only thing that a father can pass on to his son is his sinful nature. That's right! But we're born of God.

Now listen to this; this is God's Word, **John 3**; look at **verse 8**. And our Lord talking to this religious leader, this scholar, this teacher of the Scriptures, He said, "Now Nicodemus I'll illustrate the new birth. "*The wind bloweth where it listeth.*" In other words, "The wind blows where it pleases. And you can hear the sound of the wind, can't you Nicodemus?" Read it in **verse 8**, "*But you don't know where it's coming from and you don't know where it's going. The wind bloweth where it pleases.*"

Likewise, it is so with those that are born of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is sovereign in the new birth. "*He'll quicken whom He will.*" That's what the Scripture says. "*As the Father quickeneth even so the Son quickeneth whom He will.*" We have no human power over regeneration and over the new birth and over the life of God.

And then when our Lord would illustrate faith to this man Nicodemus; (look at **verse 14**) He uses metaphors and He uses pictures. He says; "Nicodemus, you know about the wilderness journey don't you?"

Yes; he knew about the wilderness journey, how that Israel left Egypt and journeyed all these years across the wilderness to the Promise Land. You know about how they murmured against God and how they said, "We don't like this light bread and we don't have any water to drink.

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You ought to have left us in Egypt.” And because of their murmuring God sent fiery serpents among the people. They bit the people and many of them died.

“And Nicodemus you know how that Moses went to God and he prayed. And God said: “Moses; make a serpent of brass like the one that has bitten the people and lift it up on a pole. And whosoever looketh; behold, he shall live.”

“Now you know that message Nicodemus, as *‘Moses lifted up that serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up, even so must Jesus Christ be lifted up that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have eternal life.’*”

Now my friends, I’m not preaching Baptist doctrine or Methodist doctrine or Catholic doctrine; I’m preaching the Word of God. I can have no better illustration of faith than this one because this is the one our Lord gave to this man Nicodemus.

Here standing before our Lord is a scholarly man, a grown man, a religious man, but a lost man, and unregenerate man. And our Lord said, *“Nicodemus, if I’ve told you earthly things and you don’t understand, how are you going to understand if I tell you heavenly things?”*

“But Nicodemus, in order to understand, in order to see, (discern) the kingdom of God you’ve got to have a miracle. You’ve got to be born again. And that new birth is the sovereign work of God.” *“The Holy Spirit quickeneth whom He will.”*

“And Nicodemus, that new birth will bring you faith. And that faith will be in Christ alone, in the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Now I want to take this illustration that our Lord gave and I want to preach this faith to you today and I want to divide it into four parts. And this is so you can remember it.

First of all: What was the problem?

Secondly: What was the remedy?

Thirdly: What was to be done with this serpent?

Fourthly: What were the people to do?

Are you interested? Well, let’s look at it together.

First of all: What was the problem?

Now to find the problem, we have to go back to **Numbers chapter 21:5-6**; here was the problem: *“And the people spake against Moses and against God. And the Lord sent fiery serpents, (poisonous serpents), among the people and they bit the people and much people died.”*

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Now I've never been bitten by a poisonous serpent and haven't been bitten by a fiery serpent or a rattlesnake. I had a friend who was. Down in Mexico about two or three years ago I was down there visiting the missionaries in Mexico.

And I have a friend there, a native pastor, by the name of Franklin. And he was out in one of the henequen fields one afternoon, walking between the henequen plants and a huge rattlesnake coiled, struck and bit him twice.

And the bite was so powerful when that snake hit him that he said he just hit the ground. His leg was almost paralyzed immediately. But Franklin had a motorcycle just a few yards away on the side of the road.

He crawled over to that motorcycle and got on the motorcycle and rode as fast as he could to a little pueblo called Canicab and there quickly the doctor attended him. And after six or eight weeks of suffering and recuperation he did live.

But suppose he'd not had the motorcycle. Suppose he'd been out there like Israel was. These people were out there in the middle of the wilderness, no transportation, no hospital, no medicine, no health, and no hope.

God sent fiery serpents among the people because of their rebellion and murmuring. They had bit the people and they were dying. Can you imagine a man who had been bitten by one of these fiery serpents; there he is lying on the ground, the venom, the poison, is in his veins. He knows it's there.

And every time his heart beats there's nothing he can do about it. But every time that heart beats it takes a little more of that venom and pulls it in and pushes it out and pulls it in and pushes it out until his whole body is permeated with all of that terrible poisonous venom.

And he knows that death is as sure as the sunset. His whole body is contaminated with this killing, poisonous, venom. Now that was the problem and my friends; that's our problem. We are contaminated with a poisonous venom that took place back yonder in the Garden of Eden called, sin.

Now, if you'll take your Bible and turn to **Psalm 51**; (now I may shock you a little bit here) but I want you to listen to the Word of God. This is the condition; the poison is in every son of Adam, not only from birth, but before birth; that's right, before we were ever born. Go back to the time when the seed was planted in the womb of a mother by a father and that seed was a sinful seed.

Now listen to **Psalm 51:5**. David is talking about sin; he said, "*My sins are ever before me: Against thee and thee only have I sinned, O Lord and done this evil in thy sight.*"

He's talking about sin. Now he tells us where it all came from. He said in **Psalm 51:5**: "*I was shapen in iniquity. In sin my mother conceived me.*"

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Now, there's no sin to the act of conceiving children. Sex is not sin. And anyone who says it is has just made a fool out of himself. Back before man ever fell, when God created Adam and Eve; He created male and female, before the fall.

And before the fall ever took place when Adam and Eve were holy, perfect, and pure as God, they were male and female. And God gave them the commandment that they were to be united together to multiply and replenish the earth. Sin came after that.

And what David is saying here; he's not saying that his mother sinned in conceiving him; he's not saying that his father sinned in begetting him; he's saying that he was conceived in sin.

In other words, when the father of the child presented the seed, it was a sinful seed because it came from a sinful father. Do you see that? It is just as the poison of the snake.

It's like they tell me that an apple; the worm is in the bloom. That's why the farmer sprays the bloom because the worm's already in the bloom. It's in the apple when it's first formed.

And the sin is in the child when it's first conceived. That's what the Scripture says. "Buy you a Bible," the old preacher use to say "and get acquainted with it."

And then in **Psalm 58:3** he goes on and says, this poison of sin is put within us at conception and we come forth; listen to **Psalm 58:3**, *the wicked are estranged from the womb. They go astray as soon as they're born speaking lies.*"

Now you look at that little new baby, fair and tender and beautiful. But the seed of sin is in there. The poison of sin is in there. This terrible corruption of evil is already in that child. You don't have to wait till it reaches a certain age.

You don't have to teach that baby to hate. I'll guarantee you he'll know how to hate. You don't have to teach him to be selfish. You don't have to teach him to lie. You don't have to teach him to love evil. That's already in there. It's planted in there at birth. It's planted in there at conception.

Now, if you'll go back and look at Israel; some of these people had just been bitten by the fiery serpents. They don't show much effect, in other words, if a snake came in here and bit me right now I could go on probably and finish this message and you wouldn't see any difference.

But after a while, an hour or two take a look at me and you begin to see some of the effects. My eyes begin to swell. I begin to turn red. Sweat begins to pop out. I begin to tremble. You see some effects.

And wait about twelve hours and you'll see my lying on the floor disfigured and swollen and in the last, in the last moments of my dying. And wait about 24 hours and you can come pick my body up and take it to the cemetery.

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And even so, when children are born you don't see the effects of sin. They look fair and lovely and cool and laugh and all. You don't see the effects of sin. But when they get up a little older and get to be teenagers and then you see the hatred, and then you see the rebellion, and then you see all the selfishness. And then you see these things begin to show themselves.

And then they get to be older. And as they grow older, middle-aged, just swollen with sin and disfigured with sin and all of this corruption is in their hatred, in their sharp words, and in their cruel deeds.

And then after a while you see them in the grave. Now that's sin, that's sin. It's planted at birth and that's the problem, that's the problem.

Second: All right, what is the remedy? Well let's look at **Numbers 21:8**; And the Lord said to Moses, *"Make a serpent of brass and set it on a pole. And whosoever shall look upon it shall live."*

Now, when Moses came down to the blacksmith and he told them to make it; he said, "God has given us a remedy and this remedy is make a serpent just like the one that bit the people. Make it out of brass and put it on a pole and whosoever shall look shall live."

Now I'm sure someone must have said, "Now hold on Moses." It was a serpent that caused the problem. It was a serpent that brought the sickness. How can a serpent also bring the cure? A serpent caused the problem; how can a serpent be the remedy?

Here's your answer and you might say the same thing, *"By man came death."* All right, the Scripture says in **1 Corinthians 15:21**: *"By man came the resurrection of the dead."*

There's just two Adams. The word Adam is man; it's the Hebrew word for man. *"In the first Adam is of the earth earthy. The second Adam is the Lord from heaven. As we have borne the image of the first Adam, the earthy one; (thank God by His grace) we'll bear the image of the second Adam the heavenly one. In Adam we died. In Christ we're made alive."*

You see my friends; a man sinned and a man had to obey. A man broke the law of God; a man had to keep the law. A man rebelled against God, therefore a man must submit to God. A man offended and was sentenced by the law and judged by the law, therefore a man must die.

"And what the law could not do because of the weakness of the flesh; (the law wasn't weak but the flesh was weak) God sending His own Son; (now watch this) in the likeness of sinful flesh."

Moses, you want the people cured? "Make a serpent of brass. Don't make it out of gold and silver and jewels and diamonds and precious stones to be wondered at; make it out of worthless brass."

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And when Christ our Lord came, He came *“As a root out of dry ground, despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, no beauty about Him that we should desire Him.”*

In fact, they didn't even believe He was the Messiah. He was born so lowly and lived so poorly. “But make it out of brass, worthless brass. Make that serpent just like the one that bit the people.”

“And when our Lord came to this earth He came down here in the likeness of sinful flesh. *“It behoved Him to be made just like His brethren and be tempted in all points as they are, yet without sin.”* He was our representative; do you see that? What a picture of redemption!

Thirdly: What was to be done with the serpent?

“Moses take the serpent, not leave it in the mold, the serpent in the mold won't help. Don't put it in the temple, the serpent in the temple won't help. Don't hold it in your hand and go around blessing the people with it and doing all these different things Moses; that's not what you do. That's not going to help the people at all. Lift it up on a pole. Raise it up between heaven and earth. Let it be a picture. Let it be a type. Let it be a figure of God's crucified Saviour and God's crucified Son, God's crucified atonement, and God's suffering Son. Lift it up on a pole.”

And my friends; it's not Christ in the manger that saves. I've got no objections to manger scenes and songs about “Sweet little Jesus boy” but it's not the Christ of the manger that saves; it's the Christ of the cross.

It's not Christ in the preacher's hand. I can't sprinkle water on you and make you holy. I can't give you a sign of the cross and make you holy. I can't touch your forehead and impart unto you power and holiness and life.

It's not Christ in the hand; it's Christ on the cross. It's not Christ in the ordinances, it's not Christ in the temple; it's Christ on the cross. I must needs go home by the way of the cross. There's no other way but this. I'll never get sight of the gates of life if I miss the way of the cross.

**“There's a fountain filled with blood
Drawn from Emanuel's veins
And sinners plunged beneath that flood
Lose all their guilty stains.”**

Lift Him up! The Father lifted Him up. And the preachers are to lift Him up, not wrap Him up in all of our intellectual oratory but lift Him up, not wrap Him up in our ceremonies, rituals, stained-glass windows, robed choirs, burning candles, and processions. Lift Him up in the simplicity of the cross.

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It's the Christ of the cross that saves. It's lift up the blood-stained cross of Jesus Christ and tell those sinners that are bitten by the poison of sin, "Look and live, look and live, look and live."

Fourth: All right, last of all: What were the people to do?

What was the problem, sin? What was the remedy, "*A Saviour made in the likeness of sinful flesh.*" What was to be done with that Saviour? Lift Him up, crucify Him, and nail Him to a cross.

What were the people to do? "*And the people said; (now watch this in Numbers 21:7) we have sinned, we have sinned.*"

You know; that's hard to say isn't it? It's easy to say, "Boy John sinned or George has sinned or Mary; oh how wicked she is. All those people; aren't they terrible?" But how difficult it is for us individually, personally, to say; "I've sinned, oh God I've sinned."

But you know; Job wrote this in **Job 33:27**: "*He looked upon men and if any say I have sinned and perverted that which was right and it profiteth me not; He will deliver his soul from going down to the pit.*"

Can you say that, "I have sinned?" The Publican said it and Christ said, "*He was justified.*" He stood in that temple and smote on his breast and cried without even lifting his eyes in presumption to heaven; he said, "*O God be merciful to me the sinner.*"

The thief on the cross said it. He looked at the other thief and he said; "Don't you fear God seeing that we are in the same condemnation? We're getting exactly what we deserve. Oh Lord remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom."

David said it, "*My sins are ever before me. Against thee and thee only have I sinned and done this evil in thy sight.*" Paul said it, "*O wretched man that I am, O wretched man.*"

You know John says, "*If we confess our sins He's faithful and just to forgive us our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*" Can you say that? "*Now if any man say he hath no sin he deceives himself and the truth is not in him. If a man says he has no sin he makes God a liar and God's Word's not in him.*"

But if we confess our sins; I wish the Holy Spirit would bring me and you and every person listening to my voice down to our knees.

I'm not asking you to touch the television or get in touch with me. I want you to get in touch with heaven, with the throne of grace, with God himself. I don't want to get between you and the Lord. I want you to do business with Him.

I want you to cry; "*Lord, be merciful to me a sinner.*" You do business with God. "*I have sinned.*"

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All right, what else? And they said, "*We have sinned.*" And Moses lifted up that serpent and he said; "Look, that's all, look. And whosoever shall look shall live." That's what **Isaiah 45:22** says; "*I am the Lord. Look unto me and be ye saved all the ends of the earth for I am God. Look unto me, look unto me.*"

**"I have a message from the Lord hallelujah
This message unto you I give
It's recorded in His Word, hallelujah
It is only that you look and live."**

It's only that you look and live, if you're bitten, if you're a sinner, if you're helpless, if you need help.

If you're without hope look to Calvary; keep looking till God speaks peace to your heart!