

Numbers 21

by Robert F. Adcock

The sermon emphasizes the essential role of faith in God's provision for salvation, illustrated through the bronze serpent in Numbers 21 and its connection to Jesus Christ.

Duration: 34:07

Scripture: Numbers 21:4, John 3:16, Acts 16:31, Romans 10:17, Hebrews 11:6, Hebrews 12:1

Topics: "Salvation By Faith", "Personal Testimony"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the simplicity of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. He explains that looking and believing are synonymous terms, and that by believing in Jesus, one can be saved from the judgment and wrath of God. The preacher shares a personal testimony of how he came to believe in Jesus and emphasizes the importance of believing in the heart, not just in the head. He concludes by highlighting the amazing provision of salvation that God has made through his Son.

Transcript

Our scripture reading this morning, we have a couple of passages. The first is found in Numbers, chapter 21, and we'll read from verse 4. And they, that is the children of Israel, 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.

And the people spoke against God and against Moses. Wherefore have you 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. And the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, and many people of Israel died.

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.

And the Lord said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, set it upon a pole, and it shall come to pass that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. Moses made a serpent of bronze 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 bronze, he lived. Now John chapter 3, just a couple of verses.

Verses 14 and 15 perhaps. 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. 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.

For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved. I thought this morning, for a while together, we might think about the subject of faith. And this reference, of course, to faith in the Word of God, believing on Jesus Christ, is closely associated with the salvation that we enjoy this morning.

And if you look through the scriptures, you look through the Word of God, you will discover that high on the list of things which the Bible teaches, that is, the doctrinal things that are mentioned in the scriptures, faith is all important. It's important in the life of the soul. Now, there are passages like Hebrews 11, 6, that remind us, without faith it is impossible to please God.

For he that comes to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. Without faith, therefore, there can be no approach to God. We must believe.

And the Word of God is just filled with thoughts that remind us that believing, looking, putting our faith in God is absolutely essential. If we are to enjoy a relationship with God, everything that we do in a spiritual way is bound up in that word faith. Without faith, no approach to God, there can be no forgiveness.

Without faith, no deliverance, and certainly no salvation. If there is no deliverance, there is no salvation. There can be no communion and fellowship with God apart from faith.

The whole spiritual concept of being a believer in Jesus Christ, a worshiper of God, is bound up in that little word faith, or belief, or trust, which is found so many times in the Word of God. I suppose every time we approach this subject, we say, What is faith? We are looking for a definition. Of course, lying right close at hand with this question is, Do I have faith? Sometimes someone will ask the question, Are you among the faithful? And there are other ways of expressing this wonderful divine truth of being identified with God through faith.

Do I have faith? When we preach about faith, we generally call upon certain passages that are found in the Word of God. I've already made reference to one found there in Hebrews 11, verse 6. Of course, Hebrews 12 is another passage. I'm thinking about a scripture like Romans 10, verse 17.

Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. What would you know about God apart from his Word? If you didn't have the Word of God to enlighten your mind, your heart, and your soul concerning the person of God and the Son, what would you know? Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. I have just a paraphrase of that passage, and it's from J. B. Phillips.

He says, Faith, you see, can only come from hearing the message. That's God's message. Faith can only come from hearing what God has to say.

He is the soul, he is the object, he is all in all when it comes to this matter of faith. And the message is the Word of Christ. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Jesus Christ is the living Word of God. This is the written Word of God, and they can become synonymous. When we read the Word of God and we believe the Word of God, and it tells us about the

person of Jesus Christ, and the fact that he is wonderful, and he is our Savior, our souls reach out in faith, and we take hold of this, and we say, I believe this, I accept this.

And we have acted in a way, in a manner that is pleasing to God, because we have trusted God. We have acted in faith toward God. There is only one reference in the scriptures, I believe, to define as such this word faith, and the whole concept of faith.

There are just 14 words that are found there in Hebrews 11.1, and it doesn't tell us, in a sense, what it is in essence, but it does tell us what it is as to its operation, what it does. And that is significant, I think, because we need to just leave it right there. There is something rather mysterious about all of the benefits that are derived from one by an act of faith or believing God and trusting God, all of the benefits that flow our way, because of an action that is taken in the mind, in the heart, and in the soul of an individual.

I have to hasten to remind you, it has to go beyond the mind. It is not just by intellectual comprehension of what is written in this book, and the things that are found here that constitute an act of faith. It is something that takes place in the heart of a man.

I think found in Numbers 21, we see faith in action. It is not called faith as such. It is all found in that word look.

Look is the word that is used. It doesn't say, have faith in the fiery serpent. It says, look at the fiery serpent.

They were asked to do something. We are asked to do something when we read the word of God. Our Lord Jesus Christ, that's the reason I read these verses in John 3, he uses that incident in Numbers 21 to explain to his hearers how they may be saved.

He uses the word believe. The word believe and faith are synonymous. They mean the same thing.

The word look and faith and believe, they all mean the same thing. So we begin to see and discover as we look at the word of God that God has made it pretty simple, and the way is very simple. It doesn't mean that a person has to be simple minded to be saved, but in a sense we have to humble ourselves and we have to open our hearts and minds and be receptive to the word of God and believe what it says for the blessing that is bound up in our God and in the person of his Son to flow into our souls.

So important that we recognize that sometimes theologically we may complicate these things, we may create difficulties for ourselves, we may use some theological jargon in seeking to convey thoughts about things that are ever so simple, yet ever so profound. But the Bible used words that are simple and understandable. Believe, trust, look, have faith in.

I know there's not one of us in this room this morning that could say, I don't understand those terms. We do understand those terms. There are terms and expressions that we use in life every day, and the Lord Jesus knew that.

And he uses this experience, this incident in the lives of the children of Israel to remind its heroes of just how simple it is to trust God, to have faith in God, and for God to provide salvation for the one that believes. This is an important discovery. Someone might read in the book of Numbers this incident that happened in the lives of the children of Israel, and not even remotely connect it with the matter of God's salvation.

But the Lord Jesus uses it because it does point out in a very marked way just how simple it is for a person to be saved. You know, we read in those verses in Numbers that the people spoke against God. They spoke against Moses.

And you know, God didn't take that lightly. He never does. Sometimes people wonder why God doesn't come in judgment in the moment of time and rectify all of the things that are wrong in the world today.

Remember, God is long-suffering. God is patient. I'm reminded of a story of a farmer that he was a defiant individual, and he tried to present an air of bravado, boasting about the fact that he didn't trust God, he didn't believe in God, he didn't believe in anything.

So he knew a local newspaper publisher, and he went to him and he told him that he had a plan. He was going to prove to people that God just didn't exist. And this is the way he purposed to prove this.

He said that on the Lord's Day, when other people, the faithful, were going to their places of worship, and they were honoring God with their presence and their prayers and their worship and praise, that he was going to plow a field. And on the Lord's Day, he would plow this field, he would sow this field, and he would reap the harvest of this field. All of these things, in defiance of God, he would do it on the Lord's Day.

He was speaking against God. Well, you know, he went through this process. He did just exactly what he said he'd do.

He cultivated it on the Lord's Day, planted it on the Lord's Day, and in October, I believe it was, the story goes, he harvested his crop on the Lord's Day, went into the town, told the publisher of the newspaper, I did all of this on the Lord's Day in defiance of God. There is no God. It didn't do anything to me.

You know, the newspaper publisher, he put this in the paper, and he had his own little byline right at the bottom, and he said, God doesn't settle up his accounts in October. You know, there are some people that are so foolish. I have defied God all of my life.

I'm a sinner, and you call me a sinner. Well, I'm a horrible sinner. God hasn't done anything to me.

I have to hasten to remind you that in the coming day, God will speak to you. God will speak to every person that speaks against him, that defies him. In the book of Revelation, I've seen that indeed just grips the heart.

It says all of those without Christ at the great white throne judgment, they will stand before God. It says the books will be opened. Every man will be judged out of the books.

Men may search those books for their names and hope that there has been some mistake made. But God will have the final word. In this case, when we read in Numbers about his dealings with the children of Israel, he chose to act immediately.

When they disobeyed, God acted, and he sent there in the camp these serpents, writhing serpents all over the place who had a bite. It burned, it was like fire, and it caused great hurt among the people of God. Many of them died, but our God is so gracious and so loving and so kind, he could have let them all die.

He could have willed it that every one of them would have been bitten by one of those serpents. They could have died in their carcasses, rotted there in the wilderness. That's not God's way.

Our God is so loving and kind and gracious in dealing with us. Everyone that names the name of Christ should be long-suffering. The fruit of the Spirit of God bespeaks of what we should be as Christians.

Sometimes because we live in a world that is so harsh, so hard, it has its impact upon us. We soon find out that we're being harsh, we're being hard, we're being unforgiving. We're not long-suffering, we're not tender, we're not kind, we're not forgiving.

We've lost touch with our God. We've lost touch with that divine work of the Spirit of God in producing spiritual fruit in our lives. Don't let that happen to you, my dear beloved brother and sister in Christ.

Only God can act justly and righteously in meting out the kind of judgment that we read about here. God, in kindness and mercy, told his servant Moses, fashion you a serpent out of brass, out of metal, make it a bronze, a brazen serpent. Put it on a pole right in the center of the camp and announce to one and all, anyone that has been bitten by one of those serpents, just look.

Now, there's nothing hard about looking. That's all he asks them to do. You just look.

And when you look, everything that is associated with that harmful bite, it will be taken away in a moment of time. You will not die. But just look.

And you know, it happened exactly as God had said it would. Those that were bitten, those that perhaps were the fear of God in their souls, aware of what they had done, and knowing full well that they deserved what they were getting, all they had to do was just get so they could get just a peek. And look, that was an act of faith.

They put into action that which they had been instructed to do. And it wasn't hard to do. It was so simple.

Just look. And when you look, that's all it takes. That's all it takes.

And you speak to men and women in the world today and you say, the only thing you have to do is believe. Just believe. You see, you get the picture.

Looking and believing are synonymous terms. They mean exactly the same thing. The Lord Jesus says, that one that believes on me, he shall not perish.

The judgment and the wrath of God that is to fall upon the godless and the Christless, it will not fall on you, but you will have eternal life. You will be a possessor of eternal life. I can never for the life of me understand how people can ever swallow that lie of being saved and being lost again.

I can't understand that. It's so plain and simple in the word of God that once we're saved, we're saved eternally. And Jesus Christ said, it is finished.

I am denying the value of the finished work of Jesus Christ if I say, the one that has saved me, I by an act of sin can remove myself from that wonderful, wonderful, treasured position of being in Christ. I don't understand that. It has to be an act of Satan himself that would deceive someone and make someone feel like, by an act of sin, that he could be lost again.

Of course, you don't understand the difference between the positional salvation that is ours, that place of security of being in Christ, and what it means to have fellowship with God. Fellowship, indeed, with God hangs upon a fragile thread, and it can be broken in a moment of time by allowing sin to come into our

lives. But we are still in the family of God.

That Israelite that died, he was no less than Israelite, and that believer that sins, he is no less a believer. He is a believer that is out of fellowship with God because he has permitted sin to have a place in his life. Oh, our God makes a wonderful, wonderful provision for that condition.

In 1 John 1, 9 it says, If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us of our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Don't ever be confused about that issue. If you have looked, if you have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, you have become a possessor of God's eternal salvation.

So looking in the Old Testament at the serpent that was upon the pole is identical with believing on the New Testament person of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Son of Man must be lifted up. The Lord Jesus was lifted up upon a pole, upon a cross, and he died upon that cross.

And you see, just as that serpent upon the pole spoke of death, the Lord Jesus hanging upon that cross, the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ met death. When we are asked to be followers of Jesus Christ, it says this, to deny self and to take up our cross daily and follow him. You know what that means? That means die to self daily.

And that's all the cross ever meant. It meant death. And when we are asked to believe in the value of the death of Jesus Christ for us, he that knew no sin, he was made sin for us.

The transfer of all of my guilt and all of my sin and its penalty upon the person of Christ, he died for our sin, according to the scriptures. And all we have to do is believe. We have to accept this.

Looking and believing are, as I mentioned before, the same thing. So while Israel looked with the natural eye, the physical eye, upon that pole and that serpent upon it, and lived, each one of us today, by believing in our hearts that Jesus Christ, as God's Son, has died as our substitute upon the cross, we become recipients of God's salvation. Romans 10 and 9 is a favorite verse of mine.

You know why? It's a chorus. I don't know what your salvation verse is, but that's mine. That's the passage of scripture that God used to rip away the scales from these blinded eyes of mine.

For thou shalt confess with thine mouth Jesus Christ is Lord. Believe in thine heart, not in your head. You can know every word in this book and still be lost and go to hell.

You've got to believe in your heart. You've got to look with a purpose. He is the Son of God.

He is dying upon that cross for me. I believe that in my soul, in my heart. I accept it.

And I'm saved. God fills up Romans 10 and 9 with the heart man believeth unto salvation. How wonderful it is to live and realize that our God has made such a wonderful provision for us in the person of his Son.

You shall be saved. I have to hasten to say this. Faith in itself is not salvation.

Someone might take their faith and believe that it's their faith, or I have a strong faith. Well, what about the person that has just a wee bit of faith, just a little faith? No, my dear beloved friend, it is not our faith and the enormity of our faith. It is faith in a person.

It is what that faith is directed toward and in that really matters. One may have a great faith in something that is indeed worthless. What about some individual today that is devoted to idolatrous worship? And he is bowing in all sincerity.

He is doing all sorts of things that he hopes and he prays zealously, sincerely will result in salvation for him. But it's not coming to him. His faith is misdirected.

His look is not at the brazen serpent. His faith is not in the uplifted person of Jesus Christ our Lord. A misdirected faith.

No, it is not the enormity of our faith that really counts. You could make salvation out of your faith. I'm very faithful.

Faithful in what? Faithful in what? What is the object of my faith? What am I truly trusting in for the salvation of my soul? And the word of God would hasten to tell us it is in the person of God's Son and in him and him alone is salvation to be found. I think there are a number of things that when you read in the scriptures, there are several conclusions that you reach. When you think about faith and how it comes to an individual that he believes the word of God, does it matter where he is? Does he have to be between four walls that has a nice steeple on the roof and there are stained glass windows? Does it matter where he is as far as the location is concerned? You know better than that.

What of all of the paraphernalia that is associated with trusting God? Someone may be fingering some beads. Someone may have a crucifix in his hand. Someone may have one foot in the baptismal tank and have his other hand on the communion table and still be lost.

And without Christ, one must be absolutely sure that that faith in his soul is directed toward the person of Jesus Christ, regardless of where he is. I dare to say, and I don't have to ask you to lift your hand, that probably over half the people in this room this morning were not saved in a church building. You can listen to testimonies of people that were saved driving down the road in their car, saved at home in the kitchen, washing the dishes, saved in so many different places.

I think about the Philippian jailer, a man that was saved in the jailhouse at midnight. He asked the question, what must I do to be saved? Paul didn't say, well, wait a daybreak, we'll go over and see if the local synagogue is open, and we'll be sure that everything is in its rightful place, and we'll open up the law, and we'll read all of these things, and we'll lay hold of God, and we'll pray through, and you'll get saved. That's just foolishness.

That's just nonsense. He made it so plain and so simple that anybody just has to deliberately go contrary to the Word of God to substitute anything for simple believing on the person of Jesus Christ. He says, man, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you'll be saved.

When? Tonight! Right now! No waiting, no prolonged period of time, no praying through, no proving yourself by faith except Christ. That Israelite that looked at that brazen serpent upon the pole, when he looked, he was healed. All the fever went out of his body.

That swollen whim, it shrunk back to its normal size. He'd been delivered! And that's what God does for us when we receive Christ as our Savior, the One that hung there upon that cross, bleeding, dying, forsaken of God, hated to be despised by men. The Son of God provided salvation for us, and the only thing we're asked to do is believe it! Believe it! I am persuaded with all of my soul, that's the reason why on a coming

day, having read in the Word of God, there is no excuse! What excuse could a man raise for not simply looking and believing in what God has provided for the salvation of his soul? None.

Absolutely none. There is no excuse. No alibis will be given, and every heart will know.

Every heart that has ever lived disobedient and rebellious against the authority and the will of God in the matter of salvation will know in a moment of time, I made a horrible mistake. It may be someone confused the issue for you in times past, but this morning, I'll tell you what, my only thought was to clear up in the mind of any person that thinks it's so complicated as far as God's salvation is concerned, is to forever set your mind at rest. It is simply by believing upon the person of Jesus Christ that we receive God's salvation, and we become children of God.

We are born again into the family of God, and we become new creatures in Christ Jesus. Shall we pray? Our Father in Heaven, we do bow in thy presence, and we are so thankful that you have made for us this wonderful plan of salvation found in the person of your Son. You did it in kindness and love and grace, and O our God, we thank thee for every person in this room who has looked away to Calvary, every one that in their heart has accepted Christ as their personal Savior.

And O Lord, if there just is one person, if there is someone here that has had a doubt, that has been deeply concerned about this matter and hasn't yet made that decision, help them, we pray thee today, to receive Christ. For this we ask in his precious and worthy name. Amen.

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