

The Fiery Serpents

by Thomas Watson

The sermon highlights the importance of faith in Christ as the only means of salvation, and warns against the dangers of murmuring against God, slighting the manna, and slighting Christ.

Scripture: Psalm 106:24

Topics: "Christ Our Savior", "Repentance And Faith"

Description

Thomas Watson preaches on the story of the Fiery Serpents from Numbers 21:6-9, highlighting the sins of ingratitude and despising Christ as the causes of God's punishment. He emphasizes the need for repentance, faith, and looking upon Christ as the ultimate Healer of sin-stung souls. Watson draws parallels between the bronze serpent in the wilderness and Jesus Christ, the spiritual bronze serpent, who offers salvation freely to those who believe in Him. He urges believers to fix their eyes on Christ, trust in His atoning sacrifice, and rejoice in the hope of being lifted up to Him in eternity.

Transcript

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"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 you; 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 a fiery serpent and set it upon a pole; and it shall come to pass, that everyone who is bitten, when he looks upon it, shall live. 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." Numbers 21:6-9

In this portion of holy Scripture, there are two things to be considered: The people of Israel's being stung, and the manner of their cure.

I. Their being stung with the fiery serpents, where observe:

1. The occasion of God's sending these fiery serpents. There were two sins which provoked the Lord to inflict this punishment:

The first sin for which God sent serpents was their murmuring. "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 bread, neither is there any water," verse 5. Speaking against God and His prophets go together. "They spoke against God and against Moses." The Chaldee reads it, "They murmured before the Lord." Murmuring is speaking against God, and it proceeds from distrust. "They believed not His Word--but murmured," Psalm 106:24-25. Just so, in the text, "There is no bread or water." They thought they would die in the wilderness, and then they spoke against God. Murmuring is the daughter of unbelief. And observe the time when they murmured; it was immediately after an eminent and glorious deliverance. "The Lord hearkened to Israel and delivered up the Canaanites, and they utterly destroyed them and their cities," verse 3. And behold the requital they make God for this signal mercy! They murmur against Him. What! To find fault with God! And just after a deliverance! The Lord, being highly provoked, sent fiery serpents among them, "and many people of Israel died," verse 6.

Oh, how suitable to their sin was this punishment! Israel burned in the heat of passion--and God made their flesh burn with extreme heat. Their speeches were venomous--and they were punished with venomous serpents. Hence observe:

DOCTRINE 1. Of all sins, God can least bear the sin of ingratitude. To be delivered--yet murmur! God immediately sent fiery serpents to avenge His quarrel. Israel not only forgot God's mercies--but abused them, Psalm 106:13. To be ungrateful for mercy, is like Absalom who, as soon as David kissed him and took him into favor--he plotted treason against him! 2 Samuel 15:10. It is like the Athenians who, in payment for the good service Aristides had done them, banished him out of their city. "Ingratitude," said Cicero, "has nothing of evil lacking in it."

Ingratitude is a sin which leaves people without excuse. If God lets loose His judgments and sends fiery serpents, they have nothing to say. Ezra 9:10, "And now, O our God, what shall we say after this?" After what? "Mercy has been extended to us in the sight of the kings of Persia--yet we have forsaken Your commandments," verse 9. What shall we say after this?

USE. Let our ingratitude be deeply laid to heart. This puts an accent upon sin, and makes it sinful out of measure. How many are the worse for God's mercies? They make a dart of God's mercies--and shoot it at Him! He gives them understanding and they serve the devil with it; He gives them an estate and they feast their lusts with it. Are these worthy to be guests at the Lord's Table--who lift up the heel against Him? Will God welcome such into His presence, as do not know how to use His kindness? Oh, that this sin may fill our faces with blushing! Let us take heed for the future, that we do not follow this bad example in the text. Let us turn all our murmurings into hosannas. Let us praise God for His mercies--and serve God with His mercies.

The second cause of God's sending the fiery serpents was their slighting of the manna. "Our soul loathed this light bread," verse 5. The Septuagint renders it "this empty bread." It is spoken of with contempt. Israel counted manna vile, in respect of other food. Manna is called "angel's food"--but they call it in disdain "light bread." This manna was miraculous; it came from heaven in an extra-ordinary way. It was mystical; it was a type and figure of the Lord Jesus who is called "the Bread of Life," John 6:48, and "the hidden manna," Revelation 2:17. The contempt, therefore, of manna was a contempt of Christ. For this God sent fiery serpents.

DOCTRINE 2. Slighting and despising the Lord Jesus is a God-provoking sin. This was Israel's crime, despising manna; which was not only physical food but a type of Christ, their spiritual food. This greatly incensed the Lord and made Him send fiery serpents among them. Thus, when we despise Christ and prefer our lusts before Him, as Israel did leeks and onions before manna--then come the fiery serpents.

USE. Let us take heed of growing weary of Christ, this blessed manna. At first, Israel highly esteemed manna; they ran out to gather it. Happy was he who could get manna. But this food from heaven, which at first was so sweet to their palate, within awhile was loathed and condemned. Our nature is such that we are apt to disesteem the richest blessings, when they are common. If diamonds were plentiful, none would value them. If the sun shone but once a year--how would it be prized! But because it shines every day--few admire this lamp of heaven. Take heed of despising Jesus Christ, Matthew 22:5. If God was so angry with Israel for slighting Christ when He was hidden under a type--how angry will He be with those who slight Christ after He has been visibly revealed! "Of how much more severe punishment shall they be thought worthy, who have trodden under foot the Son of God," Hebrews 10:29. Jesus Christ is a supereminent blessing, a treasury and storehouse of all good things. The love of God was never so much seen in giving Christ. Therefore, to slight Christ is to slight the love of God.

QUESTION. But who dares to slight Christ?

ANSWER. It is a slighting of Christ to slight His gospel and offer of grace. Has this not been England's sin? Have we not formerly been nauseated on gospel manna? Did we not grow curious and wanton, and esteemed the manna of the gospel as light bread, and was not the Lord provoked with us? Did He not send, though not fiery serpents--yet a fiery rod among us in this city, which has burnt down our dwellings! (Watson here refers to the great fire of London). Christians, I beseech you to take heed of this for the future. If God indulges with manna again, beware of surfeiting on the Bread of Life. The loathing of manna is the next step to losing manna. God will take away His mercies, if they are undervalued. If you play with the light, God will put out the light.

2. The punishment itself, which was fiery serpents. These may be understood literally; they were called fiery serpents because they were of a fiery color; or from the effect. They were seraphim, burners, for when they bit the people they burned with extreme heat and thirst. The Septuagint translates them "killing serpents." "Many of the people died," verse 6.

Also, these fiery serpents may be understood mystically. Just so, these serpents were first a type of Satan, called "the old serpent" in Revelation 12:9. He is indeed a serpent for his subtlety. The Hebrew word for "serpent" comes from a verb which signifies to use subtlety, Genesis 3:1. Just so, Satan is a serpent who is very subtle in his temptations. He has his depths, Revelation 2:24, and his devices, 2 Corinthians 2:11. The devil, with his artificial varnish, puts a fine gloss upon his temptations so that he may better draw men to his lure. He either hides his malicious designs--or colors them.

These fiery serpents were also a type of sin.

DOCTRINE 3. SIN is a fiery serpent. This serpent is bred in our nature; it is within us. We would think it sad to have spiders and serpents in our bodies. As it is said of Maximus the Emperor, his body bred vermin; but it is worse to have the serpent of sin in our souls! Sin is a serpent:

1. Sin is poison. Sin has envenomed us--and that is the reason we swell. Why does one man swell with pride, another with passion, and another with lust! Man is poisoned. If one had a child whom he dearly

loved mortally poisoned, how would he grieve for it! Our souls are poisoned--yet we grieve not!

2. Sin is a serpent for the sting of it. Sin at first shows its colors in the glass; afterwards it "bites as a serpent," Proverbs 23:32. Sin is a serpent with four stings:

It stings with guilt, Romans 3:19.

It stings with horror of conscience, which is a picture of hell. Judas felt this. All the racks and tortures in the world are but trifles, in comparison with this deadly sting. No outward comforts can ease a conscience stung with sin--any more than a crown of gold can cure a headache.

Sin stings with death, and death by sin, Romans 5:12. Sin is the wild gourd which Adam gathered and ate, and the next news was that there is death in the pot.

Sin without repentance stings the soul with damnation. This fiery serpent brings to the fiery furnace!

USE. See the sad condition of wicked men! They make light of sin--but sin is a fiery serpent which has crept into their bosom. "When the serpent has bitten one," said Pliny, "the venom and contagion of it spreads all over his body." Sin has envenomed men all over; their hearts are full of poison. "Being filled with all unrighteousness," Romans 1:29. Their tongues cast forth the poison of the serpent in oaths and curses. "The poison of asps is under their tongue," Psalm 140:3.

This may serve to humble God's own people. Though they have the meekness of the dove--yet they have something of the evil of the serpent in them. Though the curse due to sin is taken away--yet the venom of this serpent in part remains. They have much love of the world, much unbelief, much unmortified passion. Among Christ's disciples, there was pride and disputation. Though Christians have something of God's Spirit in them--yet they have something which is serpentine. This viper of sin will not be shaken off, until death. Oh, how may this humble the best of God's saints! God does not allow sin to be perfectly abolished in this life. He leaves some corruption in the heart, something of the serpent, that His people may loathe themselves in the dust. What need believers have to drink Christ's blood, which is the best antidote against the poison of the soul!

See that which may raise in us, abhorring thoughts of sin. Sin is a venomous, fiery serpent. Will any man hug a serpent? Oh, look not on the fine coat of the serpent--but the sting. It stings with the wrath of God. Pursue sin with a holy malice. "Mortify the deeds of the flesh," Romans 8:13. It is a happy thing when a Christian can say, "Though the serpent is not dead--yet it is dying." Kill this serpent--or it will kill you!

If sin is a fiery serpent--then be sensible of the malignity and virulence of this serpent; feel yourselves stung. We are ready to think what a fearful thing it is to be bitten by the fiery serpents. We have a worse serpent that is biting us--and the misery of all is that we are stung and are asleep! Ephesians 4:19. Oh, that God would, by His Spirit, awaken us that we may not sleep the sleep of death!

If sin is a fiery serpent with so many stings--then let us labor that these deadly stings fastened in our consciences may be healed. And that brings me to the second thing.

II. The manner of Israel's cure. "Make a fiery serpent, or "a serpent of brass," and set it upon a pole; and it shall come to pass that everyone that is bitten, when he looks upon it, shall live. And Moses made a serpent of brass and put it upon a pole," verse 8. In these words there is the sign--a bronze serpent; and the thing signified--Christ the Healer of souls. Just so, it is interpreted by Christ Himself: "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," John 3:14.

DOCTRINE 4. The Lord Jesus is the bronze Serpent that heals sinners stung with sin. For the further illustrating of this, I shall show you firstly--the fit analogies and resemblances between Christ and the bronze serpent. Secondly, I shall show the transcendent excellencies of Christ, the spiritual bronze serpent above that bronze serpent in the wilderness.

A. Resemblances between Christ and the bronze serpent

1. The serpent in the wilderness resembled Christ in its material. The serpent was of brass, not marble or gold. This being made of brass, it typified Christ three ways:

First, brass is an inferior metal and unlikely to produce such a noble effect. What! Was a serpent of brass to heal one that was stung? If some sovereign medicine or antidote had been applied, if the balm of Gilead had been brought, this would have been likely to have wrought a cure; but what is there to heal--in a serpent made of brass? This was a type of Christ; it resembled the lowliness of His person. He did not affect outward pomp and state; He came into the world in a lowly condition. "There was no beauty in Him, that He should be desired," Isaiah 53:2. Who that had looked upon Christ with a carnal eye would ever have thought that He would be the Messiah, the glorious Healer of the world?

Second, brass is a solid, firm metal which resembled Christ's power. "If I speak of strength, lo, he is strong," Job 9:19. Therefore, He is called "the mighty God," Isaiah 9:6. Of what invincible fortitude was He who could bear the wrath of God--and the sins of the world! He must be powerful, who could break the gates of hell and triumph over Satan upon the cross!

Third, brass shines--but does not dazzle the eyes. So Christ, though He shines in His Godhead--yet His human nature so allays the splendor of His glory that we may look upon Him now and not be overwhelmed with the immenseness and brightness of His majesty.

2. The bronze serpent resembled Christ in its figure and shape. Though the serpent was made like a serpent--yet it was no real serpent. Thus Christ, as the Scripture said, was in the likeness of sinful flesh, Romans 8:3--yet He was no sinner. He was made sin--but knew no sin, 2 Corinthians 5:21. He knew sin in the weight--but not in the act. He was purer than the sun. He had no more sin--than the bronze serpent had sting or venom in it.

3. The serpent in the wilderness resembled Christ in its erection and elevation. It was lifted up that all Israel might see it. It must not only be framed--but lifted up. Just so, Christ must not only be made a Savior--but He must be lifted up. There are four ways Christ is said to be lifted up:

First, Christ was lifted up in the acclamation of the angels. "Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others--the armies of heaven--praising God: "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to all whom God favors!" Luke 2:11-14. The angels adored Christ and were the heralds to proclaim the joyful news of a Savior to the world. Thus was Christ lifted up in the triumph of angels.

Second, Christ is lifted up in the preaching of the gospel. Just so, He is an ensign erected for all to look to, Isaiah 11:10. It is the minister's office to lift up Christ in the eyes of the world, to hold Him forth in His glory and proclaim Him as the only Messiah, and that there is no salvation in any other, Acts 4:12.

Third, Christ was lifted up upon the cross. The pole was, undoubtedly, a type of the cross, and the lifting up of the serpent on the pole was a type of Christ's being lifted up upon the cross. This was a blessed lifting up. "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me," John 12:32; that is, all who belong to the election. Oh, how happy was it for us, that this spiritual bronze serpent was erected! Christ's being lifted up upon the cross--is the cause of our being lifted up to heaven. And, in the Sacrament, there is a solemn commemoration of Christ's crucifixion.

Fourth, Christ is lifted up in our hearts by our contemplating, admiring, and loving Him. Lifting up Christ on the cross will not save us--unless He is lifted up in our hearts. When we prize Christ and set Him highest in our thoughts and esteem, this is to lift Him up in our souls. There are two chief things a Christian has to do: tread down self, and exalt Christ!

4. The bronze serpent resembled Christ in the design of its being lifted up, and that was sight, immediate knowledge. When the Israelites were stung, they had to look upon the bronze serpent, which looking implied a secret hope they had of a cure. So Christ was, therefore, lifted up on the cross that He may be looked upon by an eye of faith. The people of Israel did not need to take down the serpent from the pole and touch their sores with it; they were only to look on it and they were healed. Just so, we do not need to go to fetch Christ down from heaven (as the papists do who make Him to be corporally in the bread). No, if we only look upon Him with faith, we shall be cured of our sting.

Observe four things about the bronze serpent. There were four cases in which the bronze serpent would have done the people of Israel no good, though it was lifted up.

First, if the bronze serpent had been set up--yet they had not fixed their eye upon it, it would not have cured them. So, though Jesus Christ is lifted up as a Savior to the world--yet, if this bronze serpent is not looked upon believingly, He will not save. "He who believes not, is condemned already," John 3:18. The bronze serpent was made a type of Christ; now, the bronze serpent did not cure all people--only those who looked upon it. Just so, those who, either through ignorance or stubbornness, do not look on Christ by faith, have no benefit by Him.

Second, in case the people of Israel had not looked upon this serpent alone. If they had set up another bronze serpent by this one and looked upon both, they would not have received a cure. So, after God has set up Christ to be a Savior, if any shall presume to set up another Savior by Him (as the papists who look partly to Christ and partly to their merits), they can receive no healing virtue by Him. For us to look upon our duties equally with Christ, our prayers and tears, as expecting they should merit salvation, this is to make two bronze serpents, to set up two Christs, and then we cannot be cured. We are to use duties--but to look beyond them to Christ. They are good duties--but bad Christs. If we trust our duties for salvation, they will be fiery serpents to sting us--not bronze serpents to heal us!

Third, if the bronze serpent was set upon a pole; but Israel had looked only upon their sting and not upon the serpent--they would not have been cured. So, if we look only upon our sins and, through despair, do not look up to Christ, we have no healing from Him. To keep away from Christ because of our sins, is a disparagement to Christ--as if there were more malignity and poison in sin than virtue in this bronze serpent. Indeed, we must look with one eye upon sin--but with another eye upon Christ. Look on sin with a penitent eye and on Christ with a believing eye. Weep for that sin that slew Christ--but hope in the Lamb slain!

Fourth, if Israel had looked upon the bronze serpent; yet, if it had been with an eye of scorn or contempt as despising that remedy God had provided, they would not have been cured. Jesus Christ is lifted up--but if He is looked upon as the Jews looked upon Him when He hung on the cross, with an eye not of reverence but of disdain--He will not cure. The blasphemous Socinians look upon Christ only as a mere man, and His blood as not meritorious. These cannot be saved by Him. "He is despised of men," Isaiah 53:3. To these, He is not a bronze serpent--but a consuming fire!

5. The bronze serpent resembled Christ in the outcome and result of it. He who looked upon the serpent had an infallible cure. Just so, he who can but look wishfully on Christ by faith, is certainly saved. "Whoever believes on Him shall not perish," John 3:16. Our misery at first came in by the eye. Looking upon the forbidden fruit undid us--but looking on Christ aright saves us!

B. I shall show the transcendent excellencies of Christ, the spiritual bronze serpent, above that one in the wilderness. The bronze serpent was inanimate; it could repair life, not infuse life. But Jesus Christ gives life to the world, John 6:33. Yes, a never-dying life, John 3:15, eternal life. Life is sweet--but this word "eternal" makes it sweeter!

The bronze serpent could only cure a sting in the body. The Lord Jesus heals a more deadly sting in our souls, Psalm 103:3. So deep were these wounds that they could only be healed by deeper wounds made in Christ's side. He was willing to die to cure us.

The bronze serpent could cure only those who were within sight of it. Such as were afar off and in remote parts of the wilderness did not have their sting removed; but Jesus Christ cures none but those afar off. "They are gone far from Me," Jeremiah 2:5. The east is not so far from the west as the sinner is from God--but herein appears the virtue of our spiritual bronze serpent. He heals none but those who are afar off. Such as are not only aliens but rebels who live in the devil's territories, Christ works a cure for them, and turns them from the power of Satan, Acts 26:18.

The bronze serpent cured those that looked on it; but if they had lacked the organ of sight, there would have been no cure for them. What would a poor, blind Israelite have done? But Christ, our bronze serpent, not only cures us when we look upon Him but, if we lack our sight, He enables us to look upon Him. Christ not only saves us when we believe but gives us power to believe, Ephesians 2:8. Christ anoints us with the eye salve of His Spirit that we may look up and, looking up, be cured.

USE 1. Of information. In this mystery of the bronze serpent, see by what improbable means God sometimes effects great things. What was a bronze serpent? What likelihood was there that this should heal one who was stung? It was a mere image, a shape--and this was not applied to the wound, but only beheld and looked upon; yet it wrought a cure! Reason would, with Sarah, have laughed at this. A bitter tree cast into the waters made them sweet to drink. Clay and spit cured the blind man. We would rather think it would blind one's eyes. What is there in the rainbow to prevent a deluge? What is bread and wine in the Sacrament, that these elements should be consecrated to such a high mystery as to be a symbol of Christ's body and blood? What is more strange than that a dead man should quicken the world? But God loves to baffle human wisdom, and bring great things to pass by weak, contemptible means, 1 Corinthians 1:27-28.

This the Lord does--that His glory may shine forth the more. The less appears in outward means--the more of God is seen. The less beauty and splendor is in the loadstone, the more the virtues of it are administered. And the less outward pomp is in the instrument, the more God's wisdom and energy is

manifested.

God would have the world see what power is in His institution. God appointed the bronze serpent; therefore a word of blessing went along with it to heal. "He sent forth His Word and healed them," Psalm 107:20. In the blessed Sacrament, we are to look above the elements. A word of blessing goes along with God's institution to make this ordinance effectual for the scaling up of Christ and all His benefits to us.

In this mystery of the bronze serpent, see what infinite need we stand in of Christ. What would a stung Israelite have done without a bronze serpent? If balm is needful for one who is wounded, if an antidote is needful for one who is poisoned--then Christ, the bronze serpent, is needful for a soul stung with sin.

Yes, and what need we have to look upon Christ in the frequent celebration of the Lord's Supper, where Christ, in a special manner, is lifted up. Though we have looked upon this bronze serpent formerly--yet still we need to look upon Him. We are not perfectly healed. Indeed, if Israel looked but once on the bronze serpent, they were perfectly cured; but, though we have looked several times on Christ in the Sacrament, and can say by experience that we have fetched virtue from Him--yet we are not perfectly cured. Though the guilt of sin is taken away--yet not the presence and indwelling. Our bloody issue is not quite dried up; our wounds bleed afresh, our sins break out again.

I appeal to the best hearts alive. How often have they been stung with sin and temptation since they looked last on Christ lifted up in the Sacrament! Oh, what need then to come often to this ordinance! Herein the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper differs from the Sacrament of baptism, which is to be administered but once. This one is to be administered often, 1 Corinthians 11:26. If we consider how strong our corruptions are, how weak our graces, how numerous our needs, it may make us come often to the Lord's table where we may have a healing sight of Christ. He who lacks gold goes often to the Indies. Our spiritual indigence may renew our addresses to the Lord's Supper for strength and comfort.

See in this mystery, the cabinet of free grace opened, and God's love sparkling forth, three ways:

First, God has provided Christ, this bronze serpent, as a remedy for sin-stung sinners. Oh, infinite goodness of God that, when we had alienated from Him by apostasy, the Lord should take pity on us and, instead of brandishing His flaming sword, should erect a bronze serpent and make Christ known to us in His healing virtues! Malachi

4:2! When the angels sinned, there was no bronze serpent for them. God did not send them to the hospital to be healed--but to the jail to be punished! "They are reserved in everlasting chains," Jude 6. Oh, rich free grace--which has indulged us with a remedy and found out a way of cure for all our desperate maladies!

Second, see God's free grace that some should be healed of their sting--and not others. There are but a few healed. There is a time when sinners will not be healed. "We would have healed Babylon--but she is not healed," Jeremiah 51:9; and there is a time when sinners cannot be healed, "There is no healing of your bruise," Nahum 3:19. Now, Christian, when most die of their sin-wound, that the bronze serpent should be sent to you to cure you! Oh, stupendous grace! That God should lay His left hand upon many of the rich and noble, and lay His right hand upon you; that heaven should fall to your lot; that you should be one of those few that are saved! Cry out in admiration, "Lord, how is it that You should reveal Yourself to me--and not unto the world!" John 14:22.

Third, see God's free grace, that He cures us upon such cheap terms. When we were wounded so deadly, God did not put us to charges. We were not to bring money to purchase our cure, not rivers of oil or drops of blood; no, only look upon the bronze serpent--and the cure is effected! "Come without money and without price," Isaiah 55:1. We are not to pay for our cure. Spiritual blessings are too costly for our purse to reach. Christ made a purchase for us in His blood. All He requires is to receive it and be thankful.

See how justly all wicked men perish. God has provided a bronze serpent, a glorious Savior, that whoever believes in His blood may obtain mercy. God beseeches, yes, commands men to believe, 1 John 3:23. If, therefore, through folly they neglect Christ, or in obstinacy refuse Him, how righteous will God be in pronouncing that last and fatal sentence upon them! Those who perish under the gospel must be double damned; hell's furnace will be heated seven times hotter for them, because they put away salvation from them, Acts 13:46. Pagans perish in the lack of a bronze serpent, and professors perish in the contempt of it!

Jesus Christ said, "Come unto Me, all you sinners who are stung with guilt, and I will heal you. I conflicted with My Father's wrath. I was wounded, and out of these bleeding wounds comes forth a sovereign medicine to cure you!" But desperate sinners love their disease better than their remedy. They would rather die than look up to Christ for life. "Israel would have none of Me," Psalm 81:11. Oh, strange delirium! The old serpent, after he has stung men--has bewitched them, that they do not want a cure. Who will pity such as willfully cast away themselves? How will mercy slight their tears at last, and God triumph in their deserved ruin!

USE 2. Let us look in a right manner upon this mystical bronze serpent. "Looking unto Jesus," Hebrews 12:2. The Greek word signifies the steadfast fixing of the eye upon some lovely, beautiful object. Faith will be of more use than any other grace; as an eye, though a dim one, was of more use to a stung Israelite than any other member. Faith discerns the Lord's body. To encourage faith, consider:

1. Christ was lifted up upon the cross purposely to cure us. Christ had no other end in dying, but to heal. His blood is a sovereign balm for a sin-sick soul. Such as feel the burden of their sins, need not question Christ's willingness to save them when the very design of His death was to cure. "He heals the broken heart," Psalm 147:3. Serpents, as naturalists affirm, have a great love to their young and will hazard their lives for them. So full of love was Christ, our mystical bronze serpent, as to die for us. "By whose stripes we are healed," Isaiah 53:5.

2. Such as do not look up to Christ's merits, necessitate themselves to damnation. "He who believes not, shall be damned," Mark 16:16. Had not the Israelites lifted up their eyes to the bronze serpent, they would have died for it. If you do not look up as David did ("my eyes are ever toward the Lord," Psalm 25:15)--then you must look up as Dives did ("in hell he lifted up his eyes in torment," Luke 16:23). Oh, therefore, let us fix our eye upon the bronze serpent, looking unto Jesus! Let us look up to the sacrifice of Christ's blood, and to the cloud of incense which He sends up by His glorious intercession.

OBJECTION. "But I fear I have no faith alive in my soul whereby I should look up. Though the Israelites were stung--yet they were alive! But how dead do I find my heart!"

ANSWER. We must distinguish between one who is lifeless--and one who is without life. A sick man is lifeless and has no mind to stir--yet he is not without life. So, Christian, you may be lifeless and your grace dormant--yet the seed of faith may be alive in your heart. Did not David find his heart dull and lifeless? Though he was not dead in sin--yet he was dead in duty. Why else did he pray, "Quicken me," Psalm

119:25. But that deadness which is in a believer, he is sensible of, and this argues life. He mourns for it and never leaves until he has, in the use of means, recovered that agility and liveliness of soul which once he had.

OBJECTION. "But if my faith is alive, it is so weak that I fear I shall receive no benefit from the bronze serpent."

ANSWER. If it is a true faith, though it is weak--it will fetch virtue from Christ. Suppose an Israelite had but one eye, and that eye had been sore; yet, looking on the bronze serpent, he would have been immediately cured. Tender-eyed Leah might have been cured. Though your faith is weak, it will justify. Say as Cruciger on his deathbed, "Lord, I believe but with a weak faith; yet I believe."

OBJECTION. "But my sins are of such magnitude that I am discouraged from looking up to Christ."

ANSWER. Captivate fear and advance faith, Mark 5:36. Suppose an Israelite had been more stung and bitten than others--yet, by looking on the bronze serpent, he might have been healed as well as those who had but the least sting. Christ's blood believed in, cures the greatest stings. What can the blood of God not do? It Cured Manasseh three deadly stings--bloodshed, idolatry, and sorcery, 2 Chronicles 33:3-6.

The bronze serpent can cure the crimson sinner, Isaiah 1:18. I do not speak this that any should presume--but that no broken-hearted sinner should despair.

Let us acknowledge God's wonderful mercy in bestowing the bronze serpent upon us! Oh, bless God cordially for Christ who was lifted up upon the cross and is held forth for our consolation and salvation. How joyful was an Israelite who lay burning with his sting--when he saw the bronze serpent erected! We have infinitely more cause to be joyful for Christ, whose blood delivers us from the wrath to come, 1 Thessalonians 1:10. What would have become of us--if Christ had not pitied us and come into the world? If Christ had not been lifted up on the cross--we would have been thrown down to hell forever!

Let us, then, bow the knee in all reverence and, with the leper who was healed, return to give glory to God, Luke 17:15.

USE 3. Let this cheer up the hearts of all true believers. You who now look upon Christ lifted up upon the pole--shall shortly see Him lifted up upon the throne! You who have seen Christ in His crucifixion, shall shortly see Him in His coronation! In short, you who now behold Christ lifted up for you--shall shortly be lifted up to Him! And there you shall behold the wonders of His love, the riches of His glory, and shall be forever solacing yourselves in the light of His blessed countenance!

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