

I want us to consider a conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus in John 3:14-16. We are introduced to this conversation in v1 where we are told that Nicodemus was a Pharisee. A Pharisee was a sect of the Jews that were serious about their religion and were very strict in the keeping the details of the law. Today they would be called ultra conservative. Not only was Nicodemus a Pharisee, he was a ruler of the Jews. He had influence/authority over the people.

He recognized Jesus as a teacher of God because of the miracles Jesus did and he came by night to see Jesus. Now we are not told why he came or what he asked, but from Jesus answer, it seems he had a question about the kingdom of God. ***John 3:3 Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*** I want you to put yourself in Nicodemus's shoes and think about that answer not knowing what we know about scripture. Here we have the ruler of the Jews being told he had to be born again and this was hard to comprehend. He questioned how was he to reenter his mother's womb to be born again. Beginning in v. 5 Jesus tried to explain that he was speaking of a spiritual birth.

It seems that Nicodemus didn't get it and was somewhat skeptical. ***John 3:9-12 Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be?*** By this time Jesus seems to be becoming a little disappointing in Nicodemus, after all, Nicodemus was a ruler of the Pharisees and should know God's law as good if not better than anybody concerning the coming Messiah and the kingdom of God. ***{10} Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? {11} Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. {12} If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?*** If you don't believe earthly things then how shall you believe spiritual things? So to help him comprehend what he was talking about, Jesus gives him an illustration. This illustration is our text and it goes back to the OT; something that Nicodemus was very familiar and understood.

John 3:14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: For us to get a good appreciation of this passage, we have to know

what Nicodemus knew, and in order to do that, I want us to travel back in time to Numbers 21. In Numbers 21 we have the children of Israel out in the wilderness. Not long after Moses led them out of Egyptian slavery and they were in the wilderness headed toward the Promised Land. As they made their journey, the Lord gave them manna from heaven to eat. He provided for their needs but after a while, the people began to complain to Moses, God's chosen leader. ***Numbers 21:5 And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread.*** They spoke against God and said "our soul loatheth this light bread." They were unhappy with their food selection. They were not content with what they had and wanted something else. We can see that same attitude today can't we?

Now try to picture this scene. We're not simply talking about a handful of people. We're talking about perhaps several million people. Ex 12:37 tells us that some 640K men left Egypt and add a bunch of wives and children we come up with a substantial number. *2020 Census counts are Houston, 2,304,520; San Antonio, 1,434,625; Dallas, 1,304,442 Austin, 959,549; and Fort Worth, 918,915.* When they camped, they camped in tents and so you looked to north and there were tents as far as you could see. Then you look to the east and the same thing; then to the south and the west and all you see are tents being occupied with people. So right here in the middle of camp we have the people speaking against God and against Moses. They were tired of this light bread.

It was during all this murmuring that God reversed the character of nature. It was here that he used snakes as his agents. Normally a snake is not an attacker. They will try to slide away if a human approaches. They don't attack people unless they feel threatened/cornered; but not so here. Snakes come from everywhere and attacked the people and v6 says ***much people of Israel died.*** While they were complaining about their light bread, they saw a man across the camp fall to the pain of a snake bite and immediately sweat covered his brow. Off to the left they heard a child scream. In the near distance they heard a daughter crying for help as her mother had been bitten and had a high fever. They looked around the camp and in all directions there were snakes on the ground and dead corpses lay everywhere with hundreds of others crying out in anguish.

All of a sudden, the complaint about light bread seemed rather insignificant. ***Numbers 21:7 Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD, and against thee; pray unto the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people.*** Can you see this attitude today? When there is a crisis then people want God's help and otherwise they do not appreciate His blessings. The people asked Moses to pray to God and he did. ***Numbers 21:8-9 And the LORD said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live.*** {9} ***And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.*** So Moses gathered up what he needed and made a serpent of brass and went thru the process of shaping and molding that brass into a replicate of a serpent and placing it on a pole just as God had instructed and he held it before the people. Keep in mind we are talking about millions of people extending in all directions for the center of camp and many were dying. Moses could not go to all the people, so for the people to be saved, they had to take the initiative to look on the serpent. This is what Nicodemus knew.

John 3:14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: Just as the serpent was raised for the saving of Israel, so MUST the Son of man be lifted up for the saving of sinful man. It's interesting that God used a brass serpent to remove the deadly serpents. You would think he would have put on that pole something else maybe like an eagle. Eagles kill snakes so why didn't Moses use an eagle; if not by itself at least it would make sense to use an eagle in conjunction with that brass serpent. I'll tell you why, it's because an eagle or anything else on that pole other than a brass serpent would be altering God's instruction. Moses was the pharmacist and not the doctor. The pharmacist carries out the instructions of the doctor. *Can you imagine the doctor gives you a prescription and you go to the pharmacist to get it filled and when you get there he says to you, "This prescription says you need such-n-such, but I think you can go and get a bottle of Pepto-Bismol and mix it with salt water which should work just as well."* He is the pharmacist and has no right to alter the

prescription. Moses was the pharmacist and God is the doctor. Moses, regardless of how logical it might sound, had no authority to change God message.

All of us can recognize this regarding Moses; but so many do the same thing by adding to/taking away from God's word in areas of worship, terms for salvation, morality, etc. For instance, a real popular position for being saved is to repeat a prayer like, "*I invite Jesus into my heart as my personal savior.*" While this is easy, you find nothing in the gospel of Christ that even hints at such doctrine. Such is an eagle on the pole.

There is the idea that once a person is saved, they are always saved regardless of their behavior is an eagle on the pole. We readily see this problem with Moses but all too often we are blinded to it in today's religion. Today, preachers are pharmacist and have no authority to alter the doctor's prescription they simply need to fulfill what the doctor prescribes.

Just as Moses placed a snake on the pole to combat snakes, sin hung on the cross at Calvary to combat sin. While it was Jesus, the beloved son of God, was crucified on the cross, in a real sense it was sin on that cross because Jesus bore the sins of mankind when he hang there. ***2 Corinthians 5:21 For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.***

John 3:15 That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. Nicodemus, salvation is based on faith just like the Israelites had for the serpent on the pole. They believed that they could be saved, but they had to act on their faith. If you were bitten and decided to stay in your tent and not look at the pole, then you would die. You could stay in your tent and believe that God was Jehovah and was the God that delivered you from the Egypt and you would still die because you didn't look at the brass serpent. Your spouse could not look at the serpent for you. Now God could have removed the serpents and saved all that had been bitten, but he wanted his people to take the initiative to be obedient and assume some responsibility toward being saved. God's salvation required an active role on the one being saved.

The same is true with Christianity. God grace made salvation available to all mankind. ***(Tit 2:11) For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men,*** but it requires obedience by you to enjoy the benefits of that salvation. Notice Paul said in Eph 2:8 that salvation is by grace thru faith.

Some may have told Moses that they were not going to look at that pole because that simply makes no sense. Looking at that brass serpent can't really be a salvation issue; but it was. Only those that looked at the brass serpent on the pole lives were spared. It didn't matter if they had been bitten days before and were near death because their body was heavily inflicted with infection or they had just been bitten a few minutes before; if they looked they were saved. ***That if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.***

John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. God loved the people of Israel even though they were mumbling and complaining. Now they needed saving and God provided a way but it required their obedience. Now God could have healed them without any action at all on their part, but he wanted to save those that wanted to be saved. He made the salvation available to all, but only the obedient were spared. The same is true with us. God loved us enough to send His Son but only the obedient will be saved. In context, the phrase "whosoever believeth in him" certainly implies obedient faith and now mere acknowledgment.

Hebrews 5:9 And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him; Salvation is available to each us, but while it is available, we must obey it. Have you obeyed?