

WHAT JESUS TAUGHT - PART 1
What Jesus taught about salvation
Dr. Derek Morris

Preaching passage: John 3:14-17
Subject: What happens when people believe in Jesus who was lifted up
Complement: They will not perish but have everlasting life
Exegetical idea: When people believe in Jesus who was lifted up they will not perish but have everlasting life.
Homiletical idea: **Look in faith to Jesus and live!**
Purpose: To encourage my hearers to believe that Jesus is the Savior and to invite them to look to Him in faith and live.

Introduction

I'm sure that many of you have received this e-mail. It came as part of the junk e-mail that I receive and delete on a regular basis. I had already deleted this particular e-mail message months ago, so I had to go to a search engine and find it again! This e-mail records the supposed comments of some children who obviously didn't know much about the Bible. Here are just a few examples:

Adam and Eve were created from an apple.
Noah's wife was Joan of Ark. (Did you get this e-mail too?)
Lots' wife was a pillar of salt by day and a ball of fire by night.
Moses went to the top of Mt. Cyanide to get the ten commandments
The seventh commandment is "Thou shalt not admit adultery."
Joshua led the Hebrews in the battle of Geritol.
Solomon had 300 wives and 700 porcupines.
Samson slayed the Philistines, (sometimes referred to as the Finkelsteins) with the axe of the apostles.
And the epistles were the wives of the apostles.

Now, those comments seem humorous at first. But actually, they illustrate a troublesome trend in our culture. Children are growing up knowing less and less about the great stories of the Bible. We are rapidly becoming a biblically illiterate society. I want to suggest to you this

morning that knowing the great stories of the Bible not only helps us to learn valuable lessons for our own lives today (Rom 15:4), but it also helps us to understand the important teachings of Scripture.

The passage of Scripture that we are going to study today is a case in point. This is the first sermon in our series entitled “What Jesus Taught.” Today’s sermon is entitled “What Jesus taught about salvation.” Perhaps it should be more accurately entitled “A brief consideration of what Jesus taught about salvation.” But the teaching of Jesus about salvation that we are going to consider together this morning includes one of the significant stories from Bible history. Unless we are acquainted with that story, we will not be able to fully grasp the important truth that Jesus wants to convey.

So let’s turn to these words of Jesus about salvation. They are found in John 3:14-17. “.....” The context of these words is a conversation between Jesus and a leader of the Jews namedNicodemus. That’s right. Nicodemus, you may remember was a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin. He came to Jesus by night, convinced that Jesus is a teacher sent from God. And in the context of that conversation, Jesus makes these comments about salvation. Let’s look again at the words of Jesus in John 3:14. “.....”

How many of you are familiar with the story that Jesus is referring to here in John 3:14? It happened 1300 years earlier, during the time when Moses was leading the children of Israel. We find this significant Bible story in the Old Testament book of Numbers. Aaron, the brother of Moses, has just died. The children of Israel are making a lengthy detour around the territory of the Edomites, and they are complaining against God, once again.

We can read the story starting in Numbers 21:4-5. “.....” The children of Israel

are definitely having a bad day. Even the blessings of God, including the daily manna which God has provided for them, are a cause for complaint. “Our soul loathes this worthless bread.” And then comes verse 6 of Numbers 21. And the picture that it presents is a troubling one to many. “So the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died.” (Num 21:6) A person could create a horrible picture of God from that one verse: a mean-spirited vindictive Deity who zaps people when they step out of line. Is that an accurate description of the character of God? Not if you believe the words of Jesus, who said, “If you have seen Me you have seen the Father.” Jesus told us that God so loved the world. So what’s happening here in Numbers 21:6. “So the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died.” I believe that Scripture can give us the answer that we need. Moses reminds the children of Israel, in Deut 8:15, that the Lord had led them “through that great and terrible wilderness, in which were fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty land where there was no water.” The dangers and the difficulties were all around them. But the Lord had provided for them. The Lord had provided food in the form of manna. He had provided water from the Rock. And The Lord had protected them from the fiery serpents and scorpions. But now they are complaining against God and against Moses. “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness?” Num 21:5. The unspoken message is clear. “We wish that we weren’t Your people. We wish that You would just leave us alone.” And God honors their request. He allows them to face life and death without Him if that is their desire.

And what’s the result of this willful separation from God? The people are bitten by fiery serpents. Perhaps they were called fiery serpents because their venom burned like fire. And the

Bible tells us that many people died. Can you imagine the panic within the camp of Israel? Out in the middle of a hostile desert, with nowhere to hide? And even if you survived through the day, you had the face the uncertainty of the night. And cries were heard all around the camp as more as still more were bitten by these fiery serpents.

We don't know how long it took, but finally to children of Israel came to their senses, and sent representatives to talk with Moses. We read in Numbers 21:7, "....." And this was the answer that Moses received from the LORD. "Make a fiery serpent, and set in on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live." Num 21:8 Does that make any sense to you? How could looking at a replica of the problem provide a solution? That doesn't make any sense at all. And that's the whole point. It doesn't make any sense. It's a simple act of obedience. The LORD asks the children of Israel to reaffirm their commitment to Him as their God. They are invited to just do what the LORD asks them to do.

And the Bible records in Num 21:9, "So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived." We are not talking here about a skeptical glance with an angry scowl on your face. We are talking about a look of faith, a look of dependence, trusting that the LORD will be faithful to His promise. And the Word of God tells us that "if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived." I imagine another cry now going up in the camp. Not a cry of death, but a cry of life. Not a cry of despair. But a cry of hope. "The LORD has told us to look at the bronze serpent and we will live. Look and live! Look and live!"

Undoubtedly there were some who saw no sense either in God's instructions or the invitation. And so instead of looking towards God's provision, they looked away. And they

died in their rebellion. But some repentant sinners had the courage to believe the Word of God. They had courage to do what God asked them to do. And so in a simple act of faith, perhaps with the assistance of those around them, they made their way toward the center of the camp, and when they looked in faith, in simple obedience to the Word of God, they lived!

And Jesus says to Nicodemus, “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up.” What did Jesus mean when He said, “Even so must the Son of Man be LIFTED UP?” Obviously, this “lifting up” is very important. Listen to the words of Jesus recorded in John 8:28-29. “.....”

But again I ask, What is this lifting up of the Son of Man that must happen? Let’s listen again to the words of Jesus, found in John 12:32. “And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.” And the apostle John comments, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in John 12:33, “This He said, signifying by what death He would die.”

“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up.” Notice carefully the words of Jesus. “Even so MUST the Son of Man be lifted up.” Why? The death of Jesus on the cross is not a peripheral addendum to the gospel story. It is, rather, at the very center of God’s saving activity. That’s why the apostle Paul declares, “God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ,” (Gal 6:14) and “I have determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.” (1 Cor 2:2). “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” (1 Cor 1:18)

Jesus tells us, “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son what whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world but that the world through Him might be saved.” (Jn 3:14-17)

When a person looks in faith to Jesus, when a person realizes and accepts that God does not desire to condemn us but to save us, then, and only then, a person finds life. Abundant life. Life in all its fullness. Everlasting life. And the cry needs to go out, just as a cry went out in the camp of Israel. Not a cry of death but a cry of life. Not a cry of despair, but a cry of hope. Look to the provision that God has made. Look in faith to Jesus, and live!

Unfortunately, there will be some who reject this gracious offer. It was so during this crisis in the desert and it was so even during the ministry of Jesus. Luke records the story of a certain ruler, we call him the rich young ruler, who came to Jesus with a question about salvation. We can read the question in Luke 18:18. “.....” That’s a strange question, but it reveals a great deal about the rich young ruler. First, I want you to notice what this ruler calls Jesus. “Good Teacher.” It’s a polite title. Maybe even flattering. But it reveals a lack of commitment on the part of the speaker. Some called Jesus Master. Others called Him Lord. This ruler simply addresses Him as “Teacher.” And to add a little flattery perhaps, “Good Teacher.” And Jesus cuts through all the fluff. Follow along in Luke 18:19, “.....” In other words, “Are you willing to recognize Me for who I am? I am indeed the One who alone can be called good.”

But I want you to notice something else that tells us a great deal about this ruler. Listen to his words again: “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” Strange words indeed. You can’t do anything to inherit something. Inheritance comes because of who you are. Inheritance comes

because you are in relationship with the person who is offering the gift (Jn 17:3). You don't do anything to inherit eternal life. Eternal life is a gift to those who follow Jesus. Eternal life is a gift to those who look to Jesus in faith. And if anything gets in the way, whether it's our skepticism, or our pride, or our possessions, whatever it is.....we need to let go of it, and choose to look in faith to Jesus and live. Unfortunately, the rich young ruler refused to look to God's provision and find life. And we never hear from him again.

In contrast, we read the story of Jesus' encounter with a tax collector, recorded in Luke 19:1-10. It's interesting to see the similarities between this story and that of the meeting with the rich young ruler. This man is also rich. Not only is Zacchaeus a tax collector; and there were probably many local tax collectors in Jericho, with its balsam trade and traffic from the eastern to the western side of the Jordan. Not only is Zacchaeus a tax collector; he is a chief tax collector. He probably wore a luxurious Babylonian robe, and sandals made of the finest leather. But none of that seemed to matter now, as he climbed up that sycamore fig tree. You see, just like the rich young ruler, this rich tax collector also wanted to speak with Jesus. But that's where the similarities end. Because instead of calling Jesus "Good Teacher," Zacchaeus calls Him "Lord." And instead of turning away sorrowfully, Zacchaeus receives Jesus joyfully. And instead of hoarding his money, Zacchaeus gives it away. "Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold." Lk 19:8. His generosity and his humility demonstrate a change of heart. Zacchaeus has looked in faith to Jesus and found life! And Jesus says, "Today salvation has come to this house." Why? Because Zacchaeus gave half of what he owned to the poor? No. Why then has salvation come to his house? Because he demonstrated humility by restoring fourfold to anyone that he had wronged.

No. Those actions are just evidences that salvation has come to his house. Salvation came to Zacchaeus' house because he looked in faith to Jesus. He received Jesus joyfully. He called Jesus Lord.. "Today," Jesus said, "salvation has come to this house because he also is a son of Abraham; for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."

And Jesus accomplished that mission of seeking and saving the lost by being lifted up, just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness. And the prophesy of Jesus was fulfilled: "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself." That doesn't mean that everyone will choose to look in faith to Jesus and live. Some will choose to deliberately turn away and die in their sins. But everyone will be drawn to the perfect demonstration of the Father's love. And everyone will need to make a decision, one way or the other. And whoever chooses to look in faith to Jesus will live.

"Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world"(Jn 1:29). "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all"(Is 53:5-6). "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us"(Rom 6:8). "Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures...He was buried, and...He rose again the third day, according to the Scriptures"(1 Cor 15:3-4)

The teaching of Jesus about salvation is unmistakably clear: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." So let the cry go out throughout the camp. Let the cry go out throughout the church. Let the cry go out throughout the community. Let the cry go

out throughout the world. Not a cry of death, but a cry of life. Not a cry of despair, but a cry of hope. Today salvation has come to this house. Jesus, the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost. Look in faith to Jesus and live!

Wouldn't it be wonderful if the Lord Jesus would say again this morning, "Today salvation has come to this house"? Wouldn't that be wonderful? We're going to sing a hymn in response to the message this morning: "My Jesus, I love Thee." You'll find the words in your bulletin. As we sing this song together, if you sense the invitation to look in faith to Jesus and find life this morning, I want to encourage you not to resist God's invitation. God so loves the world, and that includes you, that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world but that the world through Him might be saved. If you sense the invitation to look in faith to Jesus this morning, if you want to receive Jesus joyfully, just like Zacchaeus, if you want to hear Jesus say to you, "Today salvation has come to this house," I want to invite you to come forward while we sing and meet me here at the front of the church. Look in faith to Jesus and live! And for those who have already made that decision, for those who have already looked in faith to Jesus and found life, let us sing this song with joy in our hearts!

The following are the actual answers (including spelling and punctuation errors) given by students who were being tested on their biblical knowledge (as reported in Vancouver Sun):

Adam and Eve were created from an apple.

Noah's wife was Joan of Ark.

Lot's wife was a pillar of salt by day and a ball of fire by night.

Samson slayed the Philistines with the axe of the apostles.

Moses went to the top of Mt. Cyanide to get the 10 Commandments.

The seventh commandment is "thou shalt not admit adultery."

Joshua led the Hebrews in the battle of Geritol.

Solomon had 300 wives and 700 porcupines.

The people who followed Jesus were called the 12 decibels.

The epistles were the wives of the apostles.

Matthew was one of the opossums.