

John 3:14-17

“Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”

Dear mourning friends, especially you dear mourning son,
Daughter-in-law and relatives: Grace be unto you and peace
From God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Again we have been reminded that it is appointed unto all people to die but once. And let us remember that it is God himself who is reminding us of this, for it is he who has taken your loved one away through death. He has done this not only for her sake (*it was her going*), but also for our sake - namely to spur us on to be seriously mindful of our last hour. We all know that we must die, and still we are tempted to become completely taken up with the affairs of this life that we forget the one thing needful.

But how are we to prepare for death? This we learn from our text and a great many other Bible passages. We read in our text:

“Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.” John 3:14-15

Why did Moses lift up the serpent in the wilderness? The people of Israel were on their journey from Egypt where they had been slaves. However, they were now traveling to the “*promised land*” of Canaan, a country rich in opportunity. But in order to reach this wonderful land of promise they were led through the wilderness. Through this wilderness they had to journey for 40 years. In spite of the fact that God in a most wonderful way fed and protected them on this journey - they often murmured against the very God who guarded, protected and fed them. God often had to send them punishments, so that they would return to him and admit their shameful sins. Once he sent them, as a punishment, poisonous snakes. So poisonous were these snakes that those who were bitten by them were doomed to die. Then the people confessed their sins and prayed for mercy as we read: **The people came to Moses and said, “We sinned when we spoke against the Lord and against you. Pray that the Lord will take the snakes away from us.” So Moses prayed for the people. The Lord said to Moses, “Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live.” So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, he lived. Numbers 21:7-9**

Moses acted according to the merciful command of God by making a serpent of brass and then putting it upon a pole. Now, all that the people had to do (*these people who were bitten by snakes*) to be saved from an otherwise certain death, was to look upon the serpent of brass - that was all. Just one look at the serpent of brass, and they would live.

Now Jesus says in our text: **“Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.” John 3:14-17** We have been bitten by the serpent of hell, Satan. We have his deadly poison in us, namely SIN. As long as that poison is in us, as long as we are sinners before God, we are doomed to die. We will not only go through bodily death, but what is a thousand times worse, eternal death. Eternal death is damnation in hell for: **“For the wages of sin is death ...” Romans 6:23**

But God, even before we could confess our sins, even before we could ask for mercy (*yes, even before the world was made*) decided to send his only begotten Son to this world to keep the law for us, to suffer and die for our sins. **“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16** He was crucified, lifted up on a cross and nailed there. Why? We find the answer in our text: **“...that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16**

Friends, that's all we have to do, we who have been bitten by the serpent of hell, we who therefore are doomed to die the dreadful eternal death. All we have to do to be saved from this death, all we have to do to gain eternal everlasting life, is to look up to this crucified Savior, look up to him in faith.

The Israelites who were bitten by the fiery serpents were in great distress, for they knew they were doomed to die. Oh what a blessed message for them when they heard that a serpent of brass had been lifted up, and all who looked on it were saved from death. We also are saved from death. If we really believe that we are bitten by the serpent of hell and admit that we have that deadly poison in us, sin, and will therefore be doomed to die an eternal death - then we can not but rejoice when we hear that God's own Son has been lifted up on the cross for us, so that all we have to do is to look up to him in faith.

What a comfort in life and what a comfort when you are about to die. If we had to trust in ourselves, our own good deeds and our keeping of God's holy law - we could never be sure that we had done enough. But no one can be saved that way, for the Holy Spirit says: **"...know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ." Galatians 2:16** No, we are justified and saved through faith in Christ alone, by looking up to the crucified one. The apostle was moved by the Holy Ghost and said: **"For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law." Romans 3:28**

Dear Lennon and Gladys, in that dark hour when you sat at the death bed of your mother, that is the simple message that you spoke to her. You asked the soon to be departed if she confessed her sins and if she believed in Jesus Christ as her personal Savior. To this she assented. With this simple childlike faith, the Lord in that moment took her from you, and as we believe, to himself in heaven. Nothing more or less needed to be said. Had I been there, I could not have said it any better than you did. The power of God is in the Gospel Word, not in the person who brings it. We are thankful to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. This victory moves us, the living, now to continue to cling to that Word of Life. By clinging to this life we will not perish eternally, but also gain eternal life.

How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?

Hold thou Thy cross
Before my closing eyes
Shine through the gloom
And point me to the skies
Heaven's morning breaks
And earth's vain shadows flee
In life and death, oh Lord
Abide with me. Amen