

Devotion on the Brazen Serpent as a Type of Christ for Wednesday after the Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity - 12 September 2012, Anno Domini

The Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity.

The Collect.

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, give unto us the increase of faith, hope, and charity; and, that we may obtain that which thou dost promise, make us to love that which thou dost command; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*



14 *And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: 15 That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life* (John 3:14-15)

I must admit that while growing up, I seldom heard this text preached upon and, when it was, I did not understand it. In those days, there was a reverent emphasis upon the Gospel and Epistles but, unfortunately often to the detriment of teaching on the

foundation underlying those writings in the Old Testament. As I have studied and learned more (and I have a very great distance to go, I know) I have come to realize the great and consistent truth that runs through the Holy Scriptures from beginning to end. This was the focus of a conversation I had only yesterday with a good and faithful minister in Miami. How can we possibly understand the meaning of the sacrifice of Christ as the Lamb of God if we had not known of the first Passover in Goshen, or of Abraham's intentioned sacrifice of Isaac on the Mountains of Moriah? It seemed in my young mind highly unlikely that Christ should be compared with a serpent. I believe that my lack of understanding was my failure to grasp the ugliness and cruelty of sin, and how Christ took upon Himself, being sinless, the sins of the world at Golgotha. What horrible revulsion must Christ, being pure and innocent, have experienced hanging on the cross as Redeemer of our souls bearing the sins of the world! How bruised was His virtuous soul as He was stripped of all His clothing for all to ridicule and humiliate Him!

It is such a joy to discover gems of truth hidden away in places of least expectation, but the Old Testament is full of such gems. They gleam from Genesis to Malachi and their radiance sheds even greater beauty upon the life and times of Christ our Lord. Instead of dread and reluctance, I approach each sortie into the Old Testament studies with an exhilarating anticipation. I hope you do, too, dear Reader. Let us begin apace:

The Brazen Serpent of the Wilderness as a Type of Christ

14 *And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: 15 That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.* I love the symbolism with which Christ spoke. How shall the Son of Man be lifted up to bear our burdens of sin? He shall be lifted up precisely as the Brazen Serpent of the Wilderness was lifted up on a Tree for all to gaze upon for healing. We may ask, "How is Christ exemplified by a brazen serpent...how came the serpent to be necessary in the wilderness?" *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. And the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much 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, 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. 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.* (Num 21:5-9) The children of Israel rebelled against God and against His chosen minister, Moses. They sinned in their rebellious attitude and actions. They hated even the gifts of God – the light Bread of Manna for which they neither labored nor appreciated.

It is likewise true that God has given, not only the breath of life, but has placed all resources in nature for our joy and satisfaction; yet, is this generation grateful to God for His beneficence? Neither was that generation to which He came and which represented all generations of mankind. A physical healing and remedy was prepared in the Brazen Serpent, and a Soul-healing was prepared in Christ at Calvary. Abraham, Moses, and all the true host of Israel looked forward to that event on Calvary's brow

just as our present day looks back to the historical and heavenly event.

In the Wilderness, the people were delivered the "hair from the dog that bit them" – sin. The wages of sin is death; therefore, an execution in the likeness of the author of sin – the Serpent of Eden – was delivered to them. God sent fiery serpents among them which resulted in a sudden and painful death. A similar snake is still prevalent in the sands of the Middle East and is called a "two-stepper" because the victim may only take two painful steps before death occurs. While my family were living there, we had to be very careful to examine the sand ahead, for they burrow into shallow sand, are sand-colored, and strike from that refuge.

For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Romans 6:23) God did not deliver retribution to these errant children, but He delivered the wages they justly deserved – death by sin. They were stung by the serpents, or by their own sins. The prognosis was always fatal! So are the wages of sin!

There was no remedy available through either Moses or the Law for the wound of the serpent (sin). Neither was there a remedy at law, nor of the Temple rituals, nor of priest or prophet for the wounds of sin for all mankind for which Jesus came to redeem. Christ, like the Brazen Serpent lifted up, was the ONLY remedy and propitiation for the wages of sin.

Moses was told to lift the Brazen Serpent upon a pole or tree like as Christ was lifted upon a Tree or wooden Cross. *Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree* (Gal 3:13) Christ endured our curse for us and remitted that curse. The Brazen Serpent, having no personality, was a symbol of that very act of Christ.

The Brazen Serpent was appointed by God as the answer for that curse that had killed many people. So Christ was appointed as God's answer for the deaths of untold multitudes by way of sin.

Just as death occurred to the first man, Adam, by way of that Old Serpent, so did life come by that second man, Jesus Christ, represented by the poisonless Serpent of Brass.

The Brazen Serpent was not a product of men's hands or any hammer – it was forged in flames of fire. So righteousness in Christ is not wrought through the labors of goodness by men, but that righteousness that belongs solely to Christ. Our salvation was forged, not by men, but by Christ in flames of Passion and Sacrifice.

It must be true that a Serpent of Brass is far stronger and durable in its constitution than a snake of flesh. Though it bears the appearance of a serpent, it has an entirely different nature. It cannot hurt, though it can heal. How like Christ, who came in the body of man, is different, fundamentally, in His nature from man. He did not come to hurt, but to heal.

If stung by the fiery serpents, even if a hundred times at once, there was a remedy in looking UP to that Brazen Serpent. Likewise, though besought round-about with multitudes of sin, we may look up to that Savior on Calvary's Cross for healing balm, for He alone is truly that Balm of Gilead.

Those people who looked upon their sores and wounds instead of UP to the Brazen Serpent, died nonetheless. God's means of healing, though made available, are disregarded to the mortal detriment of the wounded. So, those wounded and dying in their sins must look UP to Christ to receive life and healing of their sins. To seek healing from any other source is futile.

The Brazen Serpent presented an unlikely means of healing and was not consistent with human reason. Men hated serpents so much that they would rather kill them than look up to them. So, Christ is an unlikely means of salvation for all sinners. Who would have believed that God the Father's love would allow for His own Son to come among His enemies to save them? How many today, as in Pilate's courtyard, prefer to crucify Christ rather than to receive His mercy and grace? (Have you witnessed the testimonies to this fact on TV news?)

In the Wilderness, one did not need perfect vision to look up to the Brazen Serpent for salvation. Neither do we today need perfect faith (who does have?) to look up to Christ for our salvation. *And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief* (Mark 9:24)

The provision of God for the remedy of the fiery serpents was not deserved or in any way merited by the recipients of the mercy and grace evidenced by the Brazen Serpent. Neither were the crucifixion, death, and resurrection of Christ as redemption for our sins in the slightest degree merited by the beneficiaries. In fact, we are totally without merit for forgiveness. So what is the ingredient that God has poured into all of His works of mercy, grace, and forgiveness for man? *Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.* (1 John 3:1) All love flows from the Heart of God. We can have no love at all if it did not originate in that Heart, for He is ALL of Love! *He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.* (1 John 4:8)

How are the Brazen Serpent and Christ different? The Brazen Serpent saved only from temporal death; Christ saves from eternal death. The Brazen Serpent was a symbol – Christ is the thing symbolized!

The Brazen Serpent lacked a permanent virtue to heal. It was a symbol and not an idol to be worshipped. In the days of Hezekiah, men had turned to the Brazen Serpent for worship rather than the God who gave it. King Hezekiah, because of this, had the Brazen Serpent destroyed. Christ is One who must be worshipped and glorified. No King, neither Herod nor any other, could destroy Christ. (see 2 Kings 18:4)

In this account of the Brazen Serpent, we have pointed out many likenesses thereof with our Lord Jesus Christ. The Brazen Serpent points, not only to the need for a Savior, but for a steadfast faith in that Savior. Without looking up in faith, there can be no healing of our sins. Just as the Serpent mortally wounded Adam in the Garden, that Serpent must also be crushed by the heel of Christ.

My Friends and Readers, have you looked up in faith to Christ today; or do you suffer a mortal wound to your soul?