NUMBER 1500, OR LIFTING UP THE BRAZEN SERPENT

NO. 1500

A SERMON
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"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 21:9

THIS discourse, when it shall be printed, will make fifteen hundred of my sermons which have been published regularly week after week. This is certainly a remarkable fact. I do not know of any instance in modern times in which fifteen hundred sermons have thus followed each other from the press from one person, and have continued to command a large circle of readers.

I desire to utter most hearty thanksgivings to God for divine help in thinking out and uttering these sermons—sermons which have not merely been printed, but have been *read* with eagerness, and have also been translated into foreign tongues. Sermons which are publicly being read on this very Sabbath day in hundreds of places where a minister cannot be found. Sermons which God has blessed to the conversion of multitudes of souls. I may and I must joy and rejoice in this great blessing, which I most heartily ascribe to the undeserved favor of the Lord.

I thought the best way in which I could express my thankfulness would be to preach Jesus Christ again, and set Him forth in a sermon in which the simple Gospel should be made as clear as a child's alphabet. I hope that in closing the list of fifteen hundred discourses, the Lord will give me a word which will be blessed more than any which have preceded it, to the conversion of those who hear it or read it.

May those who sit in darkness, because they do not understand the freeness of salvation and the easy method by which it may be obtained, be brought into the light by discovering the way of peace through believing in Christ Jesus. Forgive this prelude. My thankfulness would not permit me to withhold it.

Concerning our text and the serpent of brass. If you turn to John's Gospel, you will notice that its commencement contains a sort of orderly list of types taken from Holy Scripture. It begins with the creation. God said, "Let there be light," and John begins by declaring that Jesus, the eternal Word, is "the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world."

Before he closes his first chapter, John has introduced a type supplied by Abel, for when the Baptist saw Jesus coming to him, he said, "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." Nor is the first chapter finished before we are reminded of Jacob's ladder, for we find our Lord declaring to Nathanael, "Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man."

By the time we have reached the third chapter, we have come as far as Israel in the wilderness, and we read the joyful words, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

We are going to speak of this act of Moses this morning, that we may all of us behold the brazen serpent, and find the promise true, "Every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon the brazen serpent, shall live." It may be that you who have looked before will derive fresh benefit from looking again, while some who have never turned their eyes in that direction may gaze upon the lifted up Savior, and this morning be saved from the burning venom of the serpent, that deadly poison of sin which now lurks in their nature, and breeds death to their souls. May the Holy Spirit make the word effectual to that gracious end.

I. I shall invite you to consider the subject first by noticing THE PERSON IN MORTAL PERIL for whom the brazen serpent was made and lifted up. Our text says, "It came to pass that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived."

Let us notice that the fiery serpents first of all came among the people because *they had despised God's way and God's bread*. "The soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way." It was God's way—He had chosen it for them, and He had chosen it in wisdom and mercy, but they murmured at it.

As an old divine says, "It was lonesome and loathsome," but still it was God's way, and therefore it ought not to have been loathsome—His pillar of fire and cloud went before them, and His servants Moses and Aaron led them like a flock, and they ought to have followed cheerfully. Every step of their previous journey had been rightly ordered, and they ought to have been quite sure that this compassing of the land of Edom was rightly ordered, too.

But no, they quarreled with God's way, and wanted to have their own way. This is one of the great standing follies of men—they cannot be content to wait on the Lord and keep His way, but they prefer a will and way of their own.

The people, also, quarreled with God's food. He gave them the best of the best, for "men did eat angels' food." But they called the manna by a reproachful title, which in the Hebrew has a sound of ridicule about it, and even in our translation, conveys the idea of contempt. They said, "Our soul loatheth this light bread," as if they thought it unsubstantial, and only fit to puff them out, because it was easy of digestion, and did not breed in them that heat of blood and tendency to disease which a heavier diet would have brought with it.

Being discontented with their God, they quarreled with the bread which He set upon their table, though it surpassed any that mortal man has ever eaten before or since. This is another of man's follies—his heart refuses to feed upon God's Word or believe God's truth. He craves for the flesh-meat of carnal reason, the leeks and the garlic of superstitious tradition, and the cucumbers of speculation.

He cannot bring his mind down to believe the Word of God, or to accept a truth so simple, so fitted to the capacity of a child. Many demand something deeper than the divine, more profound than the infinite, more liberal than free grace. They quarrel with God's way, and with God's bread, and hence there comes among them the fiery serpents of evil lusting, pride, and sin.

I may be speaking to some who have up to this moment quarreled with the precepts and the doctrines of the Lord, and I would affectionately warn them that their disobedience and presumption will lead to sin and misery. Rebels against God are apt to wax worse and worse. The world's fashions and modes of thought lead on to the world's vices and crimes.

If we long for the fruits of Egypt, we shall soon feel the serpents of Egypt. The natural consequence of turning against God like serpents is to find serpents waylaying our path. If we forsake the Lord in spirit, or in doctrine, temptation will lurk in our path, and sin will sting our feet.

I beg you carefully to observe concerning those persons for whom the brazen serpent was specially lifted up that *they had been actually bitten by the serpents*. The Lord sent fiery serpents among them, but it was not the serpents being *among* them that involved the lifting up of a brazen serpent—it was the serpents having actually poisoned them which led to the provision of a remedy.

"It shall come to pass that *every one that is bitten*, when he looketh upon it, shall live." The only people who did look and derive benefit from the wonderful cure uplifted in the midst of the camp were those who had been stung by the vipers.

The common notion is that salvation is for good people, salvation is for those who fight against temptation, and salvation is for the spiritually healthy. But how different is God's Word. God's medicine is for the sick, and His healing is for the diseased. The grace of God, through the atonement of our Lord Jesus Christ, is for men who are actually and really guilty.

We do not preach a sentimental salvation from fancied guilt, but real and true pardon for actual offenses. I care nothing for sham sinners—you who never did anything wrong, you who are so good in yourselves that you are all right—I leave you, for I am sent to preach Christ to those who are full of sin, and worthy of eternal wrath. The serpent of brass was a remedy for those who had been bitten.

What an awful thing it is to be bitten by a serpent! I dare say some of you recollect the case of Gurling, one of the keepers of the reptiles in the Zoological Gardens. It happened in October, 1852, and therefore some of you will remember it. This unhappy man was about to part with a friend who was going to Australia, and according to the wont of many, he must needs drink with him.

He drank considerable quantities of gin, and though he would probably have been in a great passion if anyone had called him drunk, yet reason and common sense had evidently become overpowered. He went back to his post at the gardens in an excited state. He had some months before seen an exhibition of snake-charming, and this was on his poor muddled brain.

He must emulate the Egyptians, and play with serpents. First he took out of its cage a Morocco venom-snake, put it round his neck, twisted it about, and whirled it round about him. Happily for him it did not arouse it so as to bite. The assistant keeper cried out, "For God's sake put the snake back," but the foolish man replied, "I am inspired."

Putting back the venom-snake, he exclaimed, "Now for the cobra." This deadly serpent was somewhat torpid with the cold of the previous night, and therefore the rash man placed it in his bosom till it revived, and glided downward till its head appeared below the back of his waistcoat. He took it by the body, about a foot from the head, and then seized it lower down with his other hand, intending to hold it by the tail, and swing it round his head.

He held it for an instant opposite to his face, and like a flash of lightning the serpent struck him between the eyes. The blood streamed down his face, and he called for help, but his companion fled in horror. And as he told the jury, he did not know how long he was gone, for he was "in a maze." When assistance arrived, Gurling was sitting on a chair, having restored the cobra to its place. He said, "I am a dead man."

They put him in a cab, and took him to the hospital. First his speech went—he could only point to his poor throat and moan. Then his vision failed him, and lastly his hearing. His pulse gradually sank, and in one hour from the time at which he had been struck, he was a corpse. There was only a little mark upon the bridge of his nose, but the poison spread over his body, and he was a dead man.

I tell you that story that you may use it as a parable, and learn never to play with sin, and also in order to bring vividly before you what it is to be bitten by a serpent. Suppose that Gurling could have been cured by looking at a piece of brass, would it not have been good news for him? There was no remedy for that poor infatuated creature, but there is a remedy for you.

For men who have been bitten by the fiery serpents of sin, Jesus Christ is lifted up—not for you only who are as yet playing with the serpent, not for you only who have warmed it in your bosom, and felt it creeping over your flesh, but for you who are actually bitten, and are mortally wounded. If any man were bitten so that he has become diseased with sin, and feels the deadly venom in his blood, it is for him that Jesus is set forth today. Though he may think himself to be an extreme case, it is for such that sovereign grace provides a remedy.

The bite of the serpent was painful. We are told in the text that these serpents were "fiery," which may perhaps refer to their color, but more probably has reference to the burning effects of their venom. It heated and inflamed the blood so that every vein became a boiling river, swollen with anguish.

In some men that poison of asps, which we call sin, has inflamed their minds. They are restless, discontented, and full of fear and anguish. They write their own damnation—they are sure that they are lost—they refuse all tidings of hope. You cannot get them to give a cool and sober hearing to the message of grace.

Sin works in them such terror that they give themselves over as dead men. They are in their own apprehension, as David says, "free among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave, whom God remembers no more." It was for men bitten by the fiery serpents that the brazen serpent was lifted up, and it is for men actually envenomed by sin that Jesus is preached.

Jesus died for such as are at their wits' end—for such as cannot think straight, for those who are tumbled up and down in their minds, for those who are condemned already—for such was the Son of man lifted up upon the cross. What a comfortable thing that we are able to tell you this.

The bite of these serpents was, as I have told you, mortal. The Israelites could have no question about that, because in their own presence "much people of Israel died." They saw their own friends die

of the snakebite, and they helped to bury them. They knew why they died, and were sure that it was because the venom of the fiery serpents was in their veins. They were left without an excuse for imagining that they could be bitten and yet live.

Now, we know that many have perished as the result of sin. We are not in doubt as to what sin will do, for we are told by the infallible Word that, "The wages of sin is death," and yet again, "Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." We know, also, that this death is endless misery, for the Scripture describes the lost as being cast into outer darkness, "where their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched."

Our Lord Jesus speaks of the condemned going away into everlasting punishment, where there shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth. We ought to have no doubt about this, and the most of those who profess to doubt it are those who fear that it will be their own portion, who know that they are going down to eternal woe themselves, and therefore try to shut their eyes to their inevitable doom.

Alas, that they should find flatterers in the pulpit who pander to their love of sin by piping to the same tune. We are not of their order. We believe in what the Lord has said in all its solemnity of dread, and knowing the terrors of the Lord, we persuade men to escape therefrom.

But it was for men who had endured the mortal bite, for men upon whose pallid faces death began to set his seal, for men whose veins were burning with the awful poison of the serpent within them—for them it was that God said to Moses, "Make you 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."

There is no limit set to the stage of poisoning. However far gone, the remedy still had power. If a person had been bitten a moment before, though he only saw a few drops of blood oozing forth, and only felt a little smart, he might look and live. And if he had waited, unhappily waited, even for half an hour, and speech failed him, and the pulse grew feeble, yet if he could but look he would live at once.

No bound was set to the virtue of this divinely ordained remedy, or to the freedom of its application to those who needed it. The promise had no qualifying clause, "It shall come to pass that everyone that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live." And our text tells us that God's promise came to pass in every case, without exception, for we read, "It came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten *any man*, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived." Thus I have described the person who was in mortal peril.

II. Secondly, let us consider THE REMEDY PROVIDED FOR HIM.

This was as singular as it was effectual. *It was purely of divine origin*, and it is clear that the invention of it, and the putting of power into it, was entirely of God. Men have prescribed several medicines, decoctions, and operations for serpent bites—I do not know how far any of them may be depended upon, but this I know—I would rather not be bitten in order to try any of them, even those that are most in vogue.

For the bites of the fiery serpents in the wilderness there was no remedy whatever, except this which God had provided, and at first sight that remedy must have seemed to be a very unlikely one. A simple look to the figure of a serpent on a pole—how unlikely to avail! How and by what means could a cure be wrought through merely looking at twisted brass?

It seemed, indeed, to be almost a mockery to bid men look at the very thing which had caused their misery. Shall the bite of a serpent be cured by looking at a serpent? Shall that which brings death also bring life? But herein lay the excellency of the remedy, that it was of divine origin—for when God ordains a cure, He is by that very fact bound to put potency into it.

He will not devise a failure, nor prescribe a mockery. It should always be enough for us to know that God ordains a way of blessing us, for if He ordains, it must accomplish the promised result. We need not know *how* it will work, it is quite sufficient for us that God's mighty grace is pledged to make it bring forth good to our souls.

This particular remedy of a serpent lifted on a pole was *exceedingly* instructive, though I do not suppose that Israel understood it. We have been taught by our Lord and know the meaning. It was a serpent impaled upon a pole. As you would take a sharp pole and drive it through a serpent's head to kill it, so this brazen serpent was exhibited as killed, and hung up as dead before all eyes. It was the image of a dead snake.

Wonder of wonders that our Lord Jesus should condescend to be symbolized by a dead serpent. The instruction to us, after reading John's Gospel, is this—our Lord Jesus Christ, in infinite humiliation, deigned to come into the world, and to be made a curse for us. The brazen serpent had no venom of itself, but it took the form of a fiery serpent.

Christ is no sinner and in Him is no sin. But the brazen serpent was in the form of a serpent, and so was Jesus sent forth by God, "in the likeness of sinful flesh." He came under the law, and sin was imputed to Him, and therefore He came under the wrath and curse of God for our sakes. In Christ Jesus, if you will look at Him upon the cross, you will see that sin is slain and hung up as a dead serpent—there too is death put to death, for "He hath abolished death and brought life and immortality to light."

And there also is the curse forever ended, because He has endured it, being "made a curse for us, as it is written, cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." Thus are these serpents hung up upon the cross as a spectacle to all beholders, all slain by our dying Lord. Sin, death, and the curse are as dead serpents now.

Oh, what a sight! If you can see it, what joy it will give you. Had the Hebrews understood it, that dead serpent dangling from a pole would have prophesied to them the glorious sight which this day our faith gazes upon—Jesus slain, and sin, death, and hell slain in Him. The remedy, then, to be looked to was exceedingly instructive, and we know the instruction it was intended to convey to us.

Please to recollect that in all the camp of Israel *there was but one remedy* for a serpent bite, and that was the brazen serpent—and there was but one brazen serpent, not two. Israel might not make another. If they had made a second, it would have had no effect. There was one and only one, and that was lifted high in the center of the camp, that if any man was bitten by a serpent he might look to it and live.

There is one Savior, and only one. There is no other name given under heaven among men whereby we must be saved. All grace is concentrated in Jesus, of whom we read, "It pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell." Christ's bearing the curse and ending the curse, Christ's being slain by sin and destroying sin, Christ bruised as to His heel by the old serpent, but breaking the serpent's head—it is Christ alone that we must look to if we would live. O sinner, look to Jesus on the cross, for He is the one remedy for all forms of sin's poisoned wounds.

There was but one healing serpent, and that one was *bright and lustrous*. It was a serpent of brass, and brass is a shining metal. This was newly-made brass, and therefore not dimmed, and whenever the sun shone, there flashed forth a brightness from this brazen serpent. It might have been a serpent of wood or of any other metal if God had so ordained, but He commanded that it must be of brass, that it might have brightness about it.

What brightness there is about our Lord Jesus Christ! If we do but exhibit Him in His own true metal, He is lustrous in the eyes of men. If we will but preach the Gospel simply, and never think to adorn it with our philosophical thought, there is enough brightness in Christ to catch a sinner's eye—ay, and it does catch the eyes of thousands. From afar the everlasting Gospel gleams in the person of Christ. As the brazen standard reflected the beams of the sun, so Jesus reflects the love of God to sinners, and seeing it, they look by faith and live.

Once more, this remedy was *an enduring one*. It was a serpent of brass, and I suppose it remained in the midst of the camp from that day forward. There was no use for it after Israel entered Canaan, but as long as they were in the wilderness, it was probably exhibited in the center of the camp, hard by the tabernacle door, upon a lofty standard. Aloft and open to the gaze of all hung this image of a dead snake—the perpetual cure for serpent venom.

Had it been made of other materials it might have been broken or have decayed, but a serpent of brass would last as long as fiery serpents pestered the desert camp. As long as there was a man bitten, there was the serpent of brass to heal him.

What a comfort is this, that Jesus is still able to save to the uttermost all that come to God by Him, seeing He ever lives to make intercession for them. The dying thief beheld the brightness of that serpent of brass as he saw Jesus hanging at his side, and it saved him. And so may you and I look and live, for He is "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever."

"Faint my head, and sick my heart,
Wounded, bruis'd, in every part,
Satan's fiery sting I feel
Poison'd with the pride of hell:
But if at the point to die,
Upward I direct mine eye,
Jesus lifted up I see,
I live by Him who died for me."

I hope I do not overlay my subject by these figures. I wish not to do so, but to make it very plain to you. All you that are really guilty, all you who are bitten by the serpent, the sure remedy for you is to look to Jesus Christ, who took our sin upon Himself, and died in the sinner's stead, "being made sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." Your only remedy lies in Christ and nowhere else. Look unto Him and be you saved.

III. This brings us, in the third place, to consider THE APPLICATION OF THE REMEDY, or the link between the serpent-bitten man, and the brass serpent which was to heal him.

What was the link? It was of the simplest kind imaginable. The brazen serpent might have been, if God had so ordered it, carried into the house where the sick man was, but it was not so. It might have been applied to him by rubbing—he might have been expected to repeat a certain form of prayer, or to have a priest present to perform a ceremony, but there was nothing of the kind. He had only to look.

It was well that the cure was so simple for the danger was so frequent. Bites of the serpent came in many ways. A man might be gathering sticks, or merely walking along, and be bitten. Even now in the desert serpents are a danger.

Mr. Sibree says that on one occasion he saw what he thought to be a round stone, beautifully marked. He put forth his hand to take it up, when to his horror he discovered that it was a coiled-up living serpent.

All the daylong, when fiery serpents were sent among them, the Israelites must have been in danger. In their beds and at their meals, in their houses and when they went abroad, they were in danger. These serpents are called by Isaiah, "flying serpents," not because they fly, but because they contract themselves, and then suddenly spring up, so as to reach to a considerable height, and a man might be well buskined, and yet not be beyond the reach of one of these malignant reptiles.

What was a man to do? He had nothing to do but to stand outside his tent door, and look to the place where gleamed afar the brightness of the serpent of brass, and the moment he looked, he was healed. He had nothing to do but to look—no priest was wanted, no holy water, no hocus-pocus, no mass-book—nothing but a look.

A Romish bishop said to one of the early Reformers, when he preached salvation by simple faith, "O Mr. Doctor, open that gap to the people and we are undone." And so indeed they are, for the business and trade of priestcraft are ended forever if men may simply trust Jesus and live.

Yet it is even so. Believe in Him, you sinners—for this is the spiritual meaning of looking—and at once your sin is forgiven. And what perhaps is more, its deadly power ceases to operate within your spirit. There is life in a look at Jesus. Is not this simple enough?

But please notice how *very personal* it was. A man could not be cured by anything anybody else could do for him. If he had been bitten by the serpent, and had refused to look to the serpent of brass, and had gone to his bed, no physician could help him.

A pious mother might kneel down and pray for him, but it would be of no use. Sisters might come in and plead, ministers might be called in to pray that the man might live, but he must die despite their prayers if he did not look. There was only one hope for his life—*he must look to that serpent of brass*.

It is just so with you. Some of you have written to me begging me to pray for you. So I have, but it avails nothing unless you yourselves believe in Jesus Christ. There is not beneath the copes of heaven, nor in heaven, any hope for any one of you unless you will believe in Jesus Christ. Whoever you may be, however much bitten of the serpent, and however near to die, if you will look to the Savior you shall live.

But if you will not do this, you must be damned, as surely as you live. At the last great day, I must bear witness against you that I have told you this straight out and plainly, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved: he that believeth not shall be damned." There is no help for it. You may do what you will, join what church you please, take the Lord's Supper, be baptized, go through severe penance, or give all your goods to feed the poor, but you are a lost man unless you look to Jesus, for this is the one remedy.

And even Jesus Christ Himself cannot, will not, save you unless you look to Him. There is nothing in His death to save you. There is nothing in His life to save you, unless you will trust Him. It has come to this—*you must look*—and look for yourself.

And then, again, it is *very instructive*. This looking, what did it mean? It meant this—self-help must be abandoned, and God must be trusted. The wounded man would say, "I must not sit here and look at my wound, for that will not save me. See there where the serpent struck me? The blood is oozing forth, black with the venom! How it burns and swells! My very heart is failing. But all these reflections will not ease me. I must look away from this to the uplifted serpent of brass."

It is idle to look anywhere except to God's one ordained remedy. The Israelites must have understood as much as this, that God required us to trust Him, and to use His means of salvation. We must do as He bids us, and trust in Him to work our cure. And if we will not do this, we shall die eternally.

This way of curing was intended that they might magnify the love of God, and attribute their healing entirely to divine grace. The brazen serpent was not merely a picture, as I have shown you, of God's putting away sin by spending His wrath upon His Son, but it was a display of divine love. And this I know because Jesus Himself said, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up. For God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son."

Plainly saying that the death of Christ upon the cross was an exhibition of God's love to men, and whosoever looks to that grandest display of God's love to man, namely, His giving His only-begotten Son to become a curse for us, shall surely live.

Now, when a man was healed by looking at the serpent, he could not say that he healed himself, for he only looked, and there is no virtue in a look. A believer never claims merit or honor on account of his faith. Faith is a self-denying grace, and never dares to boast. Where is the great credit of simply believing the truth, and humbly trusting Christ to save you?

Faith glorifies God, and so our Lord has chosen it as the means of our salvation. If a priest had come and touched the bitten man, he might have ascribed some honor to the priest. But when there was no priest in the case, when there was nothing except looking to that brazen serpent, the man was driven to the conclusion that God's love and power had healed him.

I am not saved by anything that I have done, but by what the Lord has done. To that conclusion God will have us all come—we must all confess that if saved, it is by His free, rich, sovereign, undeserved grace displayed in the person of His dear Son.

IV. Allow me one moment upon the fourth head, which is THE CURE EFFECTED.

We are told in the text that, "If a serpent had bitten any man, *when* he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived." That is to say, *he was healed at once*. He had not to wait five minutes, nor five seconds. Dear hearer, did you ever hear this before? If you have not, it may startle you, but it is true.

If you have lived in the blackest sin that is possible up to this very moment, yet if you will now believe in Jesus Christ, you shall be saved before the clock ticks another time. It is done like a flash of lightning. Pardon is not a work of time.

Sanctification needs a lifetime, but justification needs no more than a moment. You believe, you live. You trust Christ, your sins are gone. You are a saved man the instant you believe. "Oh," says one, "that is a wonder." It is a wonder and will remain a wonder to all eternity.

Our Lord's miracles, when He was on earth, were mostly instantaneous. He touched them, and the fevered ones were able to sit up and minister to Him. No doctor can cure a fever in that fashion, for there is a resultant weakness left after the heat of the fever is abated. Jesus works perfect cures, and whosoever believes in Him, though he has only believed one minute, is justified from all his sins. Oh the matchless grace of God!

This remedy healed again and again. Very possibly after a man had been healed, he might go back to his work, and be attacked by a second serpent, for there were broods of them about. What had he to do? Why, to look again, and if he was wounded a thousand times, he must look a thousand times.

You, dear child of God, if you have sin on your conscience, look to Jesus. The healthiest way of living where serpents swarm is never to take your eye off the brazen serpent at all. Ah, you vipers, you may bite if you will—but as long as my eye is upon the brazen serpent, I defy your fangs and poison-bags, for I have a continual remedy at work within me. Temptation is overcome by the blood of Jesus. "This is the victory which overcometh the world, even our faith."

This cure was of universal efficacy to all who used it. There was not one case in all the camp of a man that looked to the serpent of brass and yet died. And there never will be a case of a man that looks to Jesus who remains under condemnation. The believer *must* be saved.

Some of the people had to look from a long distance. The pole could not be equally near to everybody, but so long as they could see the serpent, it healed those that were afar off as well as those who were nigh.

Nor did it matter if their eyes were feeble. All eyes were not alike keen, and some may have had to squint, or had dimness of vision, or only one eye, but if they did but look, they lived. Perhaps the man could hardly make out the shape of the serpent as he looked. "Ah," he said to himself, "I cannot discern the coils of the brazen snake, but I can see the shining of the brass," and he lived.

Oh, poor soul, if you cannot see the whole of Christ, nor all His beauties, nor all the riches of His grace, yet if you can but see Him who was made sin for us, you shall live. If you say, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief," your faith will save you. A little faith will give you a great Christ, and you shall find eternal life in Him.

Thus I have tried to describe the cure. Oh that the Lord would work that cure in every sinner here at this moment. I do pray He may.

It is a pleasant thought that if they looked to that brazen serpent by any kind of light they lived. Many beheld it in the glare of noon, and saw its shining coils and lived. But I should not wonder that some were bitten at night, and by the moonlight they drew near, and looked up and lived.

Perhaps it was a dark and stormy night, and not a star was visible. The tempest crashed overhead, and from the murky cloud out flashed the lightning, cleaving the rocks asunder. By the glare of that sudden flame, the dying man made out the brazen serpent, and though he saw but for a moment yet he lived.

So, sinner, if your soul is wrapped in tempest, and if from out the cloud there comes but one single flash of light, look to Jesus Christ by it, and you shall live.

V. I close with this last matter of consideration—here is A LESSON FOR THOSE WHO LOVE THEIR LORD.

What ought we to do? We should imitate Moses, whose business it was to set the brazen serpent upon a pole. It is your business and mine to lift up the Gospel of Christ Jesus, so that all may see it. All Moses had to do was to hang up the brazen serpent in the sight of all.

He did not say, "Aaron, bring your censer, and bring with you a score of priests, and make a perfumed cloud." Nor did he say, "I myself will go forth in my robes as lawgiver, and stand there." No, he had nothing to do that was pompous or ceremonial. He had but to exhibit the brass serpent, and leave it naked and open to the gaze of all.

He did not say, "Aaron, bring hither a cloth of gold, wrap up the serpent in blue and scarlet and fine linen." Such an act would have been clean contrary to his orders. He was to keep the serpent unveiled. Its power lay in itself, and not in its surroundings.

The Lord did not tell him to paint the pole, or to deck it with the colors of the rainbow. Oh, no. Any pole would do. The dying ones did not need to see the pole, they only needed to behold the serpent. I dare say he would make a neat pole, for God's work should be done decently, but still the serpent was the only thing to look at.

This is what we have to do with our Lord. We must preach *Him*, teach *Him*, and make *Him* visible to all. We must not conceal Him by our attempts at eloquence and learning. We must have done with the polished lancewood pole of fine speech, and those bits of scarlet and blue, in the form of grand

sentences and poetic periods. Everything must be done that Christ may be seen, and nothing must be allowed which hides Him.

Moses may go home and go to bed when the serpent is once lifted up. All that is wanted is that the brazen serpent should be within view both day and night. The preacher may hide himself, so that nobody may know who he is, for if he has set forth Christ, he is best out of the way.

Now, you teachers, teach your children Jesus. Show them Christ crucified. Keep Christ before them. You young men that try to preach, do not attempt to do it grandly. The true grandeur of preaching is for Christ to be grandly displayed in it. No other grandeur is needed. Keep self in the background, but set forth Jesus Christ among the people, evidently crucified among them. None but Jesus, none but Jesus. Let Him be the sum and substance of all your teaching.

Some of you have looked to the brazen serpent, I know, and you have been healed, but what have you done with the brazen serpent since? You have not come forward to confess your faith and join the church. You have not spoken to any one about his soul. You put the brazen serpent into a chest and hide it away.

Is this right? Bring it out and set it on a pole. Publish Christ and His salvation. He was never meant to be treated as a curiosity in a museum. He is intended to be exhibited in the highways that those who are sin-bitten may look at Him.

"But I have no proper pole," says one. The best sort of pole to exhibit Christ upon is a high one, so that He may be seen the further. Exalt Jesus. Speak well of His name. I do not know any other virtue that there can be in the pole but its height. The more you can speak in your Lord's praise, the higher you can lift Him up, the better. But for all other styles of speech, there is nothing to be said. Do lift Christ up.

"Oh," says one, "but I have not a long standard." Then lift Him up on such as you have, for there are short people about who will be able to see by your means. I think I told you once of a picture which I saw of the brazen serpent. I want the Sunday school teachers to listen to this.

The artist represented all sorts of people clustering round the pole, and as they looked, the horrible snakes dropped off their arms, and they lived. There was such a crowd around the pole that a mother could not get near it. She carried a little babe, which a serpent had bitten. You could see the blue marks of the venom.

As she could get no nearer, the mother held her child aloft, and turned its little head that it might gaze with its infant eyes upon the brazen serpent and live. Do this with your little children, you Sunday school teachers. Even while they are yet little, pray that they may look to Jesus Christ and live, for there is no bound set to their age.

Old men, snake-bitten, came hobbling on their crutches. "Eighty years old am I," says one, "but I have looked to the brazen serpent, and I am healed." Little boys were brought out by their mothers, though as yet they could hardly speak plainly, and they cried in child language, "I look at the great snake and it bless me."

All ranks, and sexes, and characters, and dispositions, looked and lived. Who will look to Jesus at this good hour? O dear souls, will you have life or no? Will you despise Christ and perish? If so, your blood be on your own head. I have told you God's way of salvation. Lay hold on it. Look to Jesus at once. May His Spirit gently lead you to do so. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—
NUMBERS 21:4-9 AND JOHN 3;1-18

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—240, 539, 331

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.