

"So Must The Son of Man Be Lifted Up"
(John 3:14-15)
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Introduction: In What Way Are We To Believe in Jesus Christ?

- A. Recently we had Lauri Burns from The Teen Project come to speak to us about her amazing story and how she has now been equipped and empowered to help so many emancipated youth. It is a great blessing to know Lauri. She wrote a book entitled, *Punished For Purpose*. It is heart-wrenching and definitely not for children, but it is also inspirational. Part of her story shares about her struggles to find God and she tells the story of going to a particular Christian congregation. Unfortunately the way they presented Jesus Christ to her left something to be desired. She writes, *"To say it was weird is really an understatement. There were people yelling and throwing their hands in the air, and believe it or not, a bunch of them were on the floor, flopped over and weeping. Frankly, I was embarrassed for them (325)."* Both in this instance and in a prior encounter (264) Jesus was presented as a sort of magic word or rabbit's foot. If one simply asks for His help or says they "know Him" -- though this is often ill-defined -- then they will come to a concept of what it means to be "saved." I appreciated the fact that Lauri wasn't impressed with these presentations of Christianity and I hope that you aren't either!
- B. As many of you know John chapter 3 is the scene in Scripture in which Jesus is speaking to the Pharisee Nicodemus. In the prior verses, it is revealed that Nicodemus is totally confused about Jesus' words on the necessity for being born again. In a way, we can say that Nicodemus just didn't "get" what it meant to believe in Jesus.
- C. Jesus' knew his confusion, so in a sense, he begins to draw Nicodemus a picture by presenting an object-lesson of sorts from a story with which Nicodemus must have been familiar with since childhood: it was the Numbers chapter 21 account of Moses with the bronze serpent on a pole and the saving of those bitten by the fiery serpents on the ground. Jesus intended to clear things up for Nicodemus. Jesus wanted him and wants you and me to know in what WAY we are to believe in Him!
- D. To believe in Him is to believe in Him in a very specific (and albeit simple and direct) way. The Lord does not permit us to treat our faith in Him as:
 - 1. A kind of magic or mystical pass for getting into heaven.
 - 2. A kind of trust in His good life or moral teachings for us to imitate.
 - 3. A kind of representative to remind us of a generic and universal "love of God" with no concern of form or content of the faith.

So,

So let's make sure that we do NOT believe in Jesus like a pass-word for joining a club, or because He reminds us to act decently, or because He gives us this universal love of God that accepts all things and all responses ("love" that isn't really love at all, but license for relativism). Let's consider the Word of God now to know exactly where Jesus wants us to go when it comes to believing in Him and also the picture He painted for Nicodemus. It is one He painted for us too.

Part I: Our Lord Began to Teach Nicodemus by Saying, "As Moses Lifted Up the Serpent in the Wilderness"

- A. Here our Lord teaches us about something that happened in the Old Testament that was a foreshadowing or again a kind of object lesson of Jesus' saving work for us in the New Testament. By referring to this event, Jesus is really showing us in what WAY we are to believe in Him.**
- B. There are three major points of comparison (from Kretzmann's *Popular Commentary*, 423):**

#1 The bronze serpent in Numbers 21 that was lifted on a pole had the form and appearance of the poisonous snakes after which it was modeled. Just as Jesus was revealed in the form of our sinful flesh, had all of our human needs and ways, He was also lifted up as He was crucified.

#2 Just as the bronze serpent, however, had no poison, was altogether harmless, so Jesus, though in appearance like sinful man, was in fact without sin; was holy and harmless. Indeed, it was a very strange curse that fell on Him while He was crucified.

#3 And finally, just as whoever believed God's promise and looked in faith at the bronze serpent remained alive, so also every sinner that been poisoned by sin in its various forms, may now look to Jesus the Savior and while trusting in God's promise, will not perish, but have eternal life (John 3:16).

Part II: In Other Words, Our Lord Is Showing Us and Teaching Us About How To Believe In Him:

- A. How important is this?**
- B. This reminds me of how when you really get to know someone, you find out what's really important to them so that when you want to show love and consideration, you respond to what they've revealed to you about what THEY consider meaningful.**

- C. A while back after reading Gary Chapman's book on *The Five Love Languages*, I found out about how my wife is different than I am when it comes to perceiving love. I discovered that innately while I am vastly encouraged by her words of affirmation for ME, that she doesn't operate as I do. I could give her words of affirmation all day long, but if I don't show her quality time, then I actually start to make her feel as though everything else in the world is more important than she is.
- D. I have encountered this in pastoral counseling dozens and dozens of times. Folks know the "buttons" – good and bad – in important relationships, but so often we refuse to conduct ourselves accordingly. People say in essence, "Hey, this is what I'm all about, would you please acknowledge that?!" And so often in sinful pride or stubbornness, we say, "No!" But this never helps a relationship.
- E. Jesus is saying is in effect, "There is no such thing as faith in Me – as far as I'm concerned – unless it be in my crucifixion for you."

Part III: But Why Is So Much Invested in the Crucifixion?

- A. Because this is where He became your substitute to save you from sin and death. Recently, I read a book by popular writer Scott Hahn. In his book, "Lord Have Mercy," he reviews the several ways in which Jesus was our substitute (like our ECONOMIC substitute who paid our ransom), but then he commits an epic compromise. He writes on page 99 as he tries to convince his readers that we cannot go so far as to believe in Jesus as our LEGAL substitute, because, "For an innocent man to be punished in our place would itself be a kind of injustice. That itself would indicate a divine blindness or temporary madness."
- B. In writing this, Scott limits what happened when Jesus was lifted up.
- C. In taking on your flesh, Jesus Christ was literally punished for all the crimes and sins you have committed. Consequently, you don't have to live in guilt, dread, or shame...listen Christian: Jesus took all of your BAD stuff TOTALLY!
- D. But our sinful flesh wants to react in the compromising fashion, "No Jesus you don't really mean it...there are some things that are just stuck to me; you don't understand; you don't really know what I've done; you don't understand Jesus what it means to be me; you don't realize that there are some things that you could never take in my place...they are just too messed up, just too wrong...there must be limits Jesus even to what you did for me."
- E. Luther wouldn't tolerate this kind of compromise for a second, so Luther wrote: "And all the prophets saw this, that Christ was to become the greatest thief, murderer, adulterer, robber, desecrator, blasphemer, etc., there has ever been anywhere in the world (AE 26, 277)."

- F. WHY was Jesus lifted up Christian? And in what WAY are you to believe in Him? As the One who took your sin and your death. Completely, not mostly, but completely!**

Conclusion: So the Scriptures Say He Was Lifted Up

- A. These words have a double meaning:**

- 1. He was lifted up in space and time when He was on His cross hoisted up when He was crucified, AND**
- 2. He was lifted up as in being glorified – yes, even on His cross – because that is where your sin was covered by His atoning blood and that is where the devil was defeated!**

- B. As a result, this cross is your ladder to heaven; this Savior, this Substitute has cleared your path to God.**

- C. Believe in Him this way Christian: As the One who loved you so much that He *gave Himself for YOU!* (Gal. 2:20).**

- D. This is the WAY to believe in Him: He entered into our life and skin; He took our sin on Himself; He hung on the cross taking the punishment for OUR SINS, and while being lifted up was already exalted: in this as we look to Him in faith, we are saved from the sin and poison of death, now when we die physically it will only be a portal for our eternal reward. There is nothing to fear when we know in what WAY to believe in Christ whose cross has drawn us to God!**

- E. And knowing this we also know the power that produces lives that live for Him...this is also our freedom to live and love God and everyone else!**