

Introduction: We saw in recent Bible notes that Christ's Seven Words on the Cross are really the key focus on which we are to continually train our eyes of faith. A.W. Pink summed up these 'Seven Words' in his book on the subject:

Seven times the dying Savior spoke: To one thief He gave the promise that He should be with Him in Paradise (Luke 23:43); to one Apostle He confided His mother (John 19:27); to the mass of spectators He made mention of His thirst (John 19:28); to the Father He prayed for His murderers (Luke 23:34); to His God He cried out in anguish saying, 'Why have you forsaken me?'; to all creation He cried in triumph, "It is finished". Finally, when He breathed His last, He commended His spirit to His Father (Luke 23:46).

But in focusing our hearts and lives on the Cross and the manner in which our Savior suffered and died there, it is important to see that there is something else not to be missed about Christ's Cross. I am thinking about the most basic of prophecies fulfilled in Christ's death, (namely), that He would be "lifted up" to die on that Cross – even as Moses' serpent in the desert was lifted up to save those who by faith beheld that symbol of the curse. Let's study this great biblical idea of our Savior being "lifted up" for our sin and guilt, both in the Old as well as the New Testament.

Monday: read Numbers 21:4-9 & John 3:9-15. Jesus directs Nicodemus, (in his reaction to the need to be "born again" or "regenerated" in John 3:9), *to see the fruit of regeneration* in terms of Cross-centered faith. Like Nicodemus, we may not understand the mysteries of the deep work of the new birth, (which must happen before we have any hope of being able "see" Christ and receive Him as our savior), but we can certainly understand how that new spiritual life shows itself – by creating within us a faith in Christ as our crucified savior! This is how we know that we are born again – by a living faith in Christ! Of course, this faith is wrought in us by the Holy Spirit, "who works faith in us, thereby uniting us to Christ in our effectual calling" (West. Shorter Cat. Q & A # 31):

QUESTION 31. *What is effectual calling?* **ANSWER:** Effectual calling is the work of God's Spirit, whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel.

But the 1 million dollar question is: "Who is this savior Jesus, to whom the Spirit unites us by faith?" Moses, the one who made the bronze serpent in Numbers 21:4-9, would answer us this way: "You are united by faith to a savior who became the embodiment of the curse for you on the Cross - even as the serpent on the pole provided healing by *taking the deadly curse away from Israel!*"

Meditate and Pray: Give thanks that Jesus paid the full price for your sins in order to be your Savior – including absorbing the guilt and curse of our sins so that we might be forgiven!

Tuesday: read John 3:14-15; John 8:28-29; John 12:27-33. All through John's Gospel, the most important verb used to describe Christ's saving work is His being "lifted up" on the Cross. John tells us in chapter 12:33 that being "lifted up" was Jesus' intentional description of His death. Jesus also declares that His being "lifted up" would be the means of *revealing* His identity in John 8:28. Only then would His own people acknowledge who He was! No wonder, therefore, that, for Christ, this being "lifted up" was both Christ's answer to His own prayer to bring glory to His Father in John 12:28 and the fulfillment in that same verse of the Father's prediction that He would glorify *His own Name* through His Son being "lifted up" to die.

Meditate and Pray: Sing about the glory of Christ "being lifted up", both to die for our sins and to bring glory to His Father, in these words from hymn # 246 in our red Trinity hymnal:

*Man of Sorrows! what a name
For the Son of God, who came
Ruined sinners to reclaim.
Hallelujah! What a Savior!*

*Bearing shame and scoffing rude,
In my place condemned He stood;
Sealed my pardon with His blood.
Hallelujah! What a Savior!*

*Guilty, vile, and helpless we;
Spotless Lamb of God was He;
Full atonement! can it be?
Hallelujah! What a Savior!*

*Lifted up was He to die;
It is finished! was His cry;
Now in Heav'n exalted high.
Hallelujah! What a Savior!*

*When He comes, our glorious king,
All His ransomed home to bring,
Then anew His song we'll sing:
Hallelujah! What a Savior!*

Wednesday: read Psalm 32:1-7. Even in the Old Testament, it is when God “lifts up” our sin to carry it away that we find blessing, happiness and joy! As Psalm 32 declares and as we sing in hymn # 551 in the red Trinity hymnal, “How blest is he whose trespass has freely been forgiven, whose sins are wholly covered before the sight of heav’n.”

But the key word to describe how our sins are removed is the word “forgiven” in verse 1. It is a Hebrew verb that literally means for something to be “lifted up and carried away”. A common picture of this would be the scape goat of the book of Leviticus, over which the sins of Israel were confessed and onto whose head the guilt of such sin was transferred. Then that goat would be set free to wander in the desert until it died, a substitutionary victim for the sins of God’s people. In the same way, our sins were laid on Jesus, *and it was He who wandered into the desert waste and darkness of sin’s curse for our sakes.* Another picture evoked from this idea of our sin being “lifted up” and carried away is of course, the Cross. There we see our sins lifted up onto the shoulders of the Lamb of God and removed from God’s sight forever! Sing about the blessing of forgiveness which flows from such a removal of our sin in the words of hymn # 551:

*How blest is he whose trespass
Hath freely been forgiv’n,
Whose sin is wholly covered
Before the sight of Heav’n.
But he to whom Jehovah
Will not impute his sin,
Who has a guileless spirit,
Whose heart is true within.*

*While I kept guilty silence
My strength was spent with grief;
Thy hand was heavy on me,
My soul found no relief;
But when I owned my trespass,
My sin hid not from Thee,
When I confessed transgression,
Then Thou forgavest me.*

*So let the godly seek Thee
In times when Thou art near;
No whelming floods shall reach them,
Nor cause their hearts to fear.
In Thee, O Lord, I hide me,
Thou savest me from ill,
And songs of Thy salvation
My heart with rapture thrill.*

*I graciously will teach thee
The way that thou shalt go,
And with Mine eye upon thee
My counsel make thee know.
But be ye not unruly,
Or slow to understand,
Be not perverse, but willing
To heed My wise command.*

*The sorrows of the wicked
In number shall abound,
But those that trust Jehovah,
His mercy shall surround.
Then in the Lord be joyful,*

*In song lift up your voice;
Be glad in God, ye righteous,
Rejoice, ye saints, rejoice.*

Thurs/Fri: read Numbers 21:1-9 and 1 Corinthians 10:1-12. We come to the ultimate Old Testament example of what it means for Christ “to be lifted up” as our dying (and rising) Savior. Numbers 21 is a tragic chapter, recording one of the vilest examples of grumbling against God contained in all of Scripture – all the more sobering in that this grumbling occurred *after* forty years of wandering in the desert.

There had been at least ten such rebellions when this generation’s parents tested God in the desert, (Numbers 14:22). But the parents perished in the desert for their unbelief. However, things will be different in Numbers 21! *For those chastised in this chapter are the believing generation which would inherit the promised land under Joshua!* Though their sin was all the more inexcusable, given God’s provision over forty years of faithful care in the desert, God in mercy would stop their sin in its tracks!

Redemption Lesson: Give thanks for God’s timely chastisement of believers. This generation in Numbers 21 fell into the pit of unbelief which their parents dug. But God promptly sent poisonous serpents into their midst in order to nip their sinful complaints in the bud. In this way, God hedged in His people so that they would not repeat the rebellion of their parents in Numbers 14. He redeemed them from the justly deserved sentence of *forty more years of wandering!* All who looked by faith to the serpent on the pole were saved from death! In the same way, Christ is “lifted up” in John 3:14 so that *our sin* is stopped in its tracks before our profession and relationship with Him is lost forever!

Meditate and Pray: Let us give thanks that *the end for His people in Numbers 21 and for us as believers in Christ, is not* to fall in the desert, condemned for our unbelief, (1 Corinthians 10:6-10). Instead, in the very throes of our sin – we can immediately look to Christ and find forgiveness and deliverance from our guilt and certain death in sin! Praise His Name!

Sat/Sun: read Numbers 21:10-20. How beautiful that - after the terrible events of the poisonous serpents, God’s grace led Israel to confess their sin in Numbers 21:7 and gave them salvation from death as they looked by faith to the bronze serpent in Numbers 21:9. No wonder, then, that Israel sings about God’s provision of water in the desert, Numbers 21:17-18, and of the defeat of God’s enemies in Numbers 21:27-30! Redemption leads to singing! May such joy in our salvation cause us to praise and glorify God’s saving arm in our day as well!

Meditate and Pray: Ask the Lord to enable you to experience more and more that joy of your salvation, which our Westminster Shorter Catechism says is meant to be, “one of the benefits that accompany our salvation”. How does Q & A # 36 put it?

Q. 36. *What are the benefits which in this life do accompany or flow from justification, adoption and sanctification?*

A. The benefits which in this life do accompany or flow from justification, adoption and sanctification, are, assurance of God’s love, peace of conscience, **joy in the Holy Ghost**, increase of grace, and perseverance therein to the end.

But I am sensitive here, (with many struggling in our church family with ill-health, pandemic burn-out or unstable job futures), that this joy may at times appear to be fleeting, at least as far as our experience of joyful feelings is concerned. But take heart: the reality is that God’s joy in our lives through the Spirit of Christ is a *desert blessing, surprisingly bubbling up in our days of greatest thirst and trial.*

As one Scottish catechism put it in further describing the joy which we are to have in the Holy Spirit: Q. “What are the peculiar seasons of this joy? A. The time of special manifestations after a dark night of desertion, [Isa. 54:7, 8](#); the time of tribulation for Christ's sake, [Acts 16:25](#); the time of God's remarkable appearance for his church, [Ex. 15:1](#); and sometimes in or about the time of death, [Psalm 23:4](#).” (Fisher’s Commentary on the Westminster Shorter Catechism)

How wonderful – we can expect joy to increase precisely when our trials are most grievous! In the Red Sea, in prison, in the valley of the Shadow - May our experience in such dark days be the fresh discovery of the light of God’s countenance shining upon us!