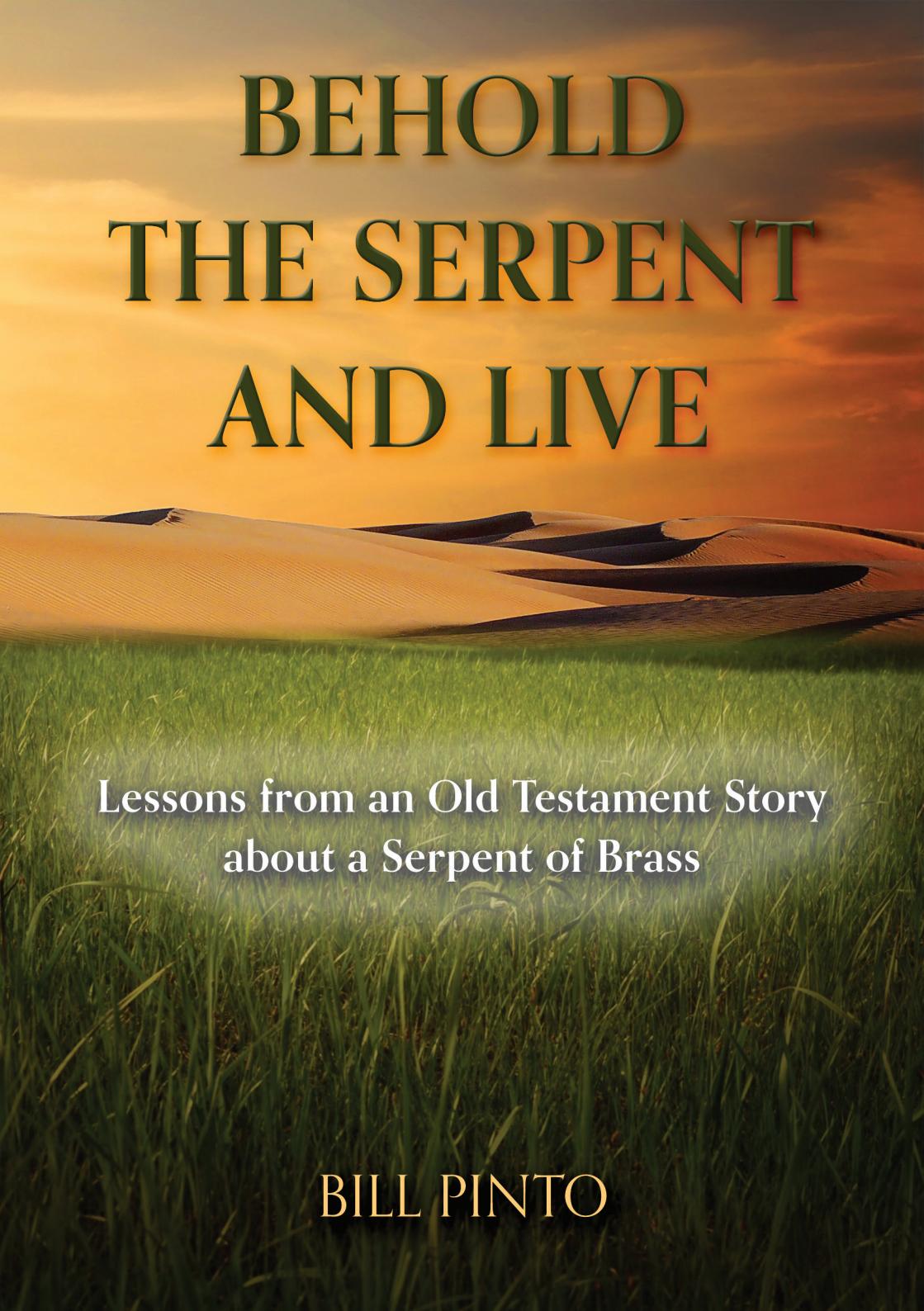


BEHOLD THE SERPENT AND LIVE



Lessons from an Old Testament Story
about a Serpent of Brass

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BEHOLD THE SERPENT AND LIVE

Our story begins in the Egyptian desert. Here, the children of Israel were once again rebelling and complaining against God. They “spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness?” Numbers 21:5.

At this point, the children of Israel were on their way to Canaan after being miraculously freed from the bondage of the Egyptians. Yet instead of cherishing the blessings which God had bestowed upon them, the Israelites indulged a spirit of discontent. As a rebuke to this spirit, “the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died.” Numbers 21:6.

Following this fearful demonstration of God’s wrath, the Israelites appealed to Moses.

“We have sinned,” they said, “for we have spoken against the LORD, and against thee; pray unto the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us.” Vs 7.

Upon their request, “Moses prayed for the people”. And as a result, 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.” Numbers 21:8-9

What an amazing paradox! In order to survive, the Israelites had to behold an image of the very creature which was killing them. The only remedy for the serpents' deadly poison was to behold a serpent made of brass.

Let us now consider an interesting verse in the New Testament regarding the humanity of Christ.

“Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil;” Hebrews 2:14.

At the end of this study, we'll examine the striking parallels that exist between these two verses (Hebrews 2:14 and Numbers 21:9). Though for now, let us take a brief glimpse into the life of a king.

In 2012, the Australian Museum ran an exhibition on Alexander the Great. As one entered the exhibition, they were faced with a question painted in large letters on the entrance wall. The question asked: ‘When was Alexander first called great?’ And below the large letters lay the historical answer: ‘Some three hundred years after his death.’

Upon reading that question, I instantly recalled Daniel 8:8. I recalled how the Bible called Alexander ‘great’ over a hundred years before he was even born. In fact, the Bible states he waxed “very great”. And that at his strongest – at his very peak – his greatness would be taken away. It would be broken.

Alexander died when he was only 33 years old, yet history describes him as one of the bravest men that has ever lived. He never saw a battle from behind, but consistently fought at the head of his troops in the heat of the fight. On one occasion, Alexander was embarking upon a highly fortified city. As his soldiers began to scale the walls, they were assailed by sharp arrows and hot oil. For the first time, Alexander saw his soldiers drawing back. Yet ever ready to seize the opportunity, Alexander took a ladder for himself and climbed it over the wall.

On the other side, however, Alexander was surrounded by enemies, and it wasn't long until he was almost killed. Nevertheless, in witnessing this act of courage, Alexander's retreating soldiers were revived. In fact, it strengthened them to such a degree that they went forward with fresh boldness, and they too started to make it over the wall. When finally, a black man called Cleitus – who happened to be a close associate of Alexander's – was there to save his life. This is the kind of bravery which heralds the name of Alexander the Great.

Undoubtedly, it's a name of military genius. Alexander could change a battle in a moment's thought. He could identify where the weaknesses lay and instantly knew which tactics to employ. Most importantly, Alexander inspired his men. Although almost always outnumbered, he never once lost a battle. In the battle of Arbela, Alexander was outnumbered by up to 200,000 men. And even then, the victory was his. In fact, Arbela was probably Alexander's greatest ever victory. His bravery, exploits, and genius were unparalleled.

As a result, Alexander's exploits have been enshrined throughout the pages of history. Even today, exhibitions are being held to uncover the legacy of this conqueror almost 2500 years after his death.

You see, Alexander determined himself to always be remembered. It was out of this desire that Alexander built himself a city. At its time, the city of Alexandria in Egypt was the capital of the world for its library, philosophy, and wisdom. Sadly, it was also largely renowned for its pa-

gan teachings and corrupted Bible manuscripts.

Nevertheless, such were the achievements which Alexander fulfilled in order to be remembered throughout all time. But my question to you is: Will Alexander the Great be remembered in heaven? Come with me to Job chapter 24.

“Drought and heat consume the snow waters: [so doth] the grave [those which] have sinned. The womb shall forget him; the worm shall feed sweetly on him; he shall be no more remembered; and wickedness shall be broken as a tree.” Job 24:19-20

Job declares that the wicked will not be remembered in heaven. And in spite of all his conquests, Alexander died a drunk, debauched, and immoral man; a violent man. This is what the Bible says about the wicked:

“They are exalted for a little while, but are gone and brought low; they are taken out of the way as all [other], and cut off as the tops of the ears of corn.” Job 24:24

At Christ’s return, the name of Alexander the Great will no longer be remembered. Having died in a drunken, debauched state, Alexander was lost eternally. Yet the humblest Christian who accepts Christ as his personal Saviour will not only live for eternity, he’ll have a name to endure for all eternity. One which far exceeds the grandeur of Alexander the Great.

In Isaiah 56 we find a most beautiful promise. It’s a passage I once showed to a Sunday-keeping pastor who believed that the Sabbath was no longer binding. He asked me to show him where in the Bible gentiles were required to keep the Sabbath, so I took him to this passage.

“Blessed [is] the man [that] doeth this, and the son of man [that] layeth hold on it; that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and keepeth his hand from doing any evil.” Isaiah 56:2

Notice what the prophet says in the following verse:

“Neither let the son of the stranger, that hath joined himself to the LORD, speak, saying, The LORD hath utterly separated me from his people: neither let the eunuch say, Behold, I [am] a dry tree.”
Isaiah 56:3

Here we find a promise that is not just for Israel. This promise, as the Lord declares, is for the son of the stranger. This promise encompasses every human being; anyone who has joined himself to the Lord. And in this promise, Christ is speaking to the eunuch and says: “neither let the eunuch say, Behold I [am] a dry tree”.

A eunuch is someone who’s been castrated. He cannot have children. Hence, there can be no son to carry on the family name. But God instructs the eunuch not to look at himself “as a dry tree”. On the contrary, Christ assures him:

“Even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off.” Isaiah 56:5

This beautiful promise continues on throughout the entire chapter. In verse 7, the Lord affirms: “Even them will I bring to my holy mountain”.

To those who make a covenant with the Lord and live in obedience to His will, God promises a name that will never be cut off. A name that will endure throughout all eternity. The one thing which Alexander sought for most dearly is available to the meekest, humblest soul who accepts Christ into their life. You see, Alexander the Great did lose a battle. He lost the greatest battle that can ever be fought. The battle against self.

Yes, Alexander conquered a great part of the known world. No army or soldier could stand before him. But he couldn’t conquer self. The law

of sin crushed this great military leader. Although he was a king - the ruler of the world - he was in bondage to sin; a slave to death. And when eternity begins, his memory, his accomplishments, and his name will all be forgotten.

It's the same for each of us today. Irrespective of how famous you may be, how rich, or how enviable, if you do not conquer self, you too will perish. Your name will vanish, and your life will be forgotten.

Every single soul is involved in this battle. Anyone who dies wilfully obeying the law of sin – living only to please themselves – will be lost eternally. They will die in their sin, which is to die in rebellion against God, His law, and His government. In this condition, no one is fit to be a citizen of the heavenly kingdom. Otherwise, sin would be immortalised and you would become an immortal sinner. So the Lord has no choice. Only the one whose life and character has been transformed can be trusted to be saved, and trusted to enter in through the pearly gates.

This critical transformation is what the Bible calls the born-again experience. It is true conversion. It requires a new life, new thoughts, and new desires. Notice how the apostle Paul describes this experience.

“Therefore if any man [be] in Christ, [he is] a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” 2 Corinthians 5:17

The Bible calls the converted person “a new creature”. The old life - with all its habits and practises - has passed away. “All things are become new”. Consider how explicit this passage is. Conversion is not a modification of the old life. It’s not an improvement. It’s a completely new life. That’s why it’s called being ‘born-again’.

This is important because it’s where most become trapped. Today, Christians base their understanding of conversion upon the church

and what they witness around them. But I implore you; don't base your understanding on the variables around you. Base it on what God's Word says! 2 Corinthians 5:17 declares that "if any man [be] in Christ, [he is] a new creature". The old man is gone. He's no longer recognised because self no longer reigns. Now, he's living by the law of heaven. He has holy thoughts, loving motives, and pure desires.

At the beginning of my Christian walk, I sincerely witnessed this born-again experience. Although I've struggled a few times since, I testify before God of the power I experienced in my life at that time - in my prayer-life, in my family-life, and in the church. And I was one who came straight out of the world. Like the child Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 13, I knew nothing. Yet as I was studying and reading, God slowly revealed to me what I should do, and I'd apply it to my life. Very quickly, the Lord was changing me. Little by little, as "I became a man, I put away childish things." 1 Corinthians 13:11.

Yet today, this is what the church teaches about being born-again:

1. A brother hears the gospel (whether by a tract, a colporteur, or God's providence) and accepts it.
2. The brother has bible studies.
3. He makes adjustments in his life (lifestyle changes, health reform etc).
4. He comes to a decision to be baptised.
5. He becomes a church member.

Essentially, this is how the church perceives the conversion process. It's determined by the things one does. Here, an individual still sins occasionally and then repents. What's more, he or she is taught to believe that that's normal. The whole theology in the church propounds this point. That's why the nature of Christ is the most controversial subject in the church today. If Christ's nature was in any way different to your own, then you can only be expected to sin and repent. Your only duty is to do your best.

Friends, this comfortable philosophy is not what the Bible teaches. Although the entire church and every Christian in the world might be living a life of sin-and-repent, that doesn't make it right. One's understanding of conversion must be founded upon the Word.

When I first began to teach victory over sin, I experienced immense reproach. Mostly, I was accused with teaching 'perfectionism'. To begin with, Sister White states that "the closer you come to Jesus, the more faulty you will appear in your own eyes; for your vision will be clearer, and your imperfections will be seen in broad and distinct contrast to His perfect nature." (Ellen White, *Steps to Christ*, 64.)

Secondly, if my life fails to live up to what I'm teaching, I don't change God's word as a result. I don't reinterpret God's word differently because no one in the world is experiencing victory over sin. God's word calls us to "be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect". Matthew 5:48. The commandment is clear. Problems only arise when people base their understanding of God's law upon the majority. They base it upon what the theologians teach, what the ministers teach, and even what they see happening before their eyes. As a result, Biblical conversion is understood to mean a life of 'sin-and-repent'. This is exactly what Satan wants us to believe! This is his counterfeit conversion experience.

In Paul's letter to the Corinthians, we saw the true definition of conversion. Now let us see how the apostle John describes it.

"Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not..." 1 John 3:6.

Is there any room for sin in this verse? How about in verse 8?

"He that committeth sin is of the devil..." 1 John 3:8.

To the converted Christian, there should be no place for self in the life. There should be no place for the devil; no place for a life of 'sin-and-

repent'. The true born-again experience is a life of victory! For it is a life motivated by the fruits of the spirit; actions determined by love, joy, and peace.

Friends, this is how one gains an understanding of conversion. It's based on the Word of God, not on what your church or pastor may teach. God's word cannot lie. And God's word requires that "every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity." 2 Timothy 2:19.

If you call yourself a Christian and name the name of Christ, you're required to depart from iniquity. You see, conversion is not a modification of the old; it's not an improvement. You might modify or improve a house to make it look better, but it's still the same house. That's not what being a new creature means. Being a new creature means demolishing the old house entirely, and building up from a new foundation. The foundation of God's Holy Word.

You see friends, Satan is not ignorant of this truth. He knows the power of true conversion because He's been watching it for six thousand years. He saw it in Abel, Seth, and holy men all throughout that Holy line. He saw it in the prophets, the apostles, the reformers, in Christians fed to the lions, and in men and women of humble standing. He's seen souls experiencing real victory; souls experiencing Christ lived out in their lives. Satan has been watching it for thousands of years. So when a person has that living experience, Satan knows he is at a great loss. That's just the reason he's invested so heavily in a counterfeit experience. The moment a person understands true conversion and applies it in their life, Satan loses his power over them.

Thus, he has designed a counterfeit system. A fake religious experience which the church teaches to be conversion. In this system, one is taught to keep the commandments (the letter of the law); to study the Bible and teach it to others; develop a right character; institute health reform; and help the needy.

Now, you may be a little confused. There's nothing wrong with any of these things! Of course, we're to keep the commandments. Of course, there should be health reform in the life. Of course, one should study their Bible, be charitable, and develop a right character.

The problem with this system, however, is the teaching that these attributes constitute conversion. This causes one to fulfil them out of necessity and out of their own strength. This is where the problem lies. A Christian can be immensely disciplined. Soldiers are trained in the army, athletes are trained in sport, and Christians can also train themselves. But that doesn't mean they're converted. People might be keeping the law in its letter, but they're not keeping it in their hearts. It depends on the motive for why you do what you do.

Indeed, Jesus saw this counterfeit two thousand years ago. He saw these very things lived out in a man called Nicodemus, and he exposed it. You see, Nicodemus was a Pharisee; a ruler of the Jews. No one kept the commandments and the letter of the law like he did. He practised the strictest health reform. And he wasn't just a student or teacher of the Bible; Jesus called him a master of Israel. He was a deeply charitable man and he helped the needy as well as the church. Nicodemus had a faultless character. He wasn't a hypocrite. So for all these attributes, can you imagine how Nicodemus looked upon himself? Do you know how his peers looked upon him?

"He was a strict Pharisee, and prided himself on his good works. He was widely esteemed for his benevolence and his liberality in sustaining the temple service, and he felt secure of the favor of God....he regarded himself as sure of a place in the kingdom of God. He felt that he needed no change." (Ellen White, *The Desire of Ages*, 171.)

This man - in his life, knowledge, and character - was faultless. None but Christ could have seen through his life. Although Nicodemus was certain that he needed no change, Jesus saw a need indeed.

"Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

John 3:3

Nicodemus felt that he was secure of a place in the kingdom. Yet to this man, the Lord says: unless you're born again, you cannot see the kingdom of God.

"Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and [of] the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." John 3:5

Friends, Jesus is not speaking to Caiaphas or some other wicked, corrupt man. Christ found a man with the most faultless character in Jerusalem, and He tells him twice: you must be born again or you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.

The harsh reality is that the great majority of Christians today are in this condition. Indeed, Nicodemus topples us when it comes to outward acts and knowledge, and even in sincerity. Nicodemus was deceived because he was following a counterfeit system, but he was still sincere. So what do you think Christ would say to you and me?

Consider for a moment why the nine volumes of the testimonies were written. They're testimonies to brothers and sisters in the church (elders, ministers etc) who were making a total shipwreck of their faith and yet thought they were walking with the Lord. That's the reason we're admonished to read them. Often one will see a lot of their own life in those testimonies.

At the end of the day, the root of the problem is always the same. It all comes down to whether a man is or is not converted. Every issue in the church, every controversy - whether it's a division or a false doctrine - comes back to unconverted souls. It's as simple as that. When you solve this problem, you solve all the problems in the church. When the

church is full of consecrated and converted men and women, there's unity of faith. There's a pure faith. And there's no controversy. How can this be? It's because truly converted Christians are not living for self anymore. They're living for Christ. It's a revival which needs to happen before the end shall come.

Now, this is actually good news. Yet a revival can only take place in those who recognise the need for a revival in their lives. You see, Nicodemus felt that he had no need of change. So how can a revival take place in his life while he's in that condition? That's why it's a counterfeit. That's why he was deceived. And it's the same reason why Christ is speaking to us today. We have to recognise the need for change in our lives before the necessary revival can take place.

Now, you may be thinking that if Nicodemus had all these good qualities and still had to be born again, what hope is there for me? Return with me to John chapter 3, and notice the passage to which Christ directs Nicodemus' thoughts.

“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up:” John 3:14

The people of Israel had to look and live. Nicodemus knew exactly what Christ was talking about when He referred to this experience. Look at the very next verse.

“That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.” John 3:15

The Israelites had to believe by faith in the serpent which was lifted up on the pole. They knew there was no saving value in that brazen statue, but their faith had to pierce through to the Messiah, their Saviour. Nicodemus understood this perfectly. And Jesus told him that the serpent which was lifted up was a prophecy pointing to Himself. By this, Jesus was saying: ‘You have to look to me for salvation. Don't think

you're secure of the favour of God. You're looking in the wrong place. Don't look to your works, to your attributes, to your resume. You've been bitten by the serpent and you need to be saved from the deadly poison. Look to me and live.'

The work of conversion - the work of the Holy Spirit - is a supernatural work. Nicodemus had to look to a Divine source. One can plan to have Bible studies, go to church, and be baptised. But one cannot plan to be born-again. Why? Because that is not man's work to initiate. That work is initiated by God. The part man plays is in responding to God's call. You must not resist.

As the Holy Spirit works upon your heart, as it prompts in you holy thoughts, desires, and changes, and as you start contemplating these things and are drawn to Christ, the born-again experience commences. And although you mustn't resist it, it's God who initiates that work. It has nothing to do with man. That's why Christ is telling Nicodemus: you've got to be born from above. That's why He says:

"The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." John 3:8.

It's a work wholly belonging to God. Our part is to simply respond to His call and not to resist. This is what Nicodemus had to do. This is how Christ draws us to Himself; as described in John 3:14. And Jesus repeats this same message in John 12:32.

"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all [men] unto me." John 12:32

It's a beautiful promise. Even if we fail in sharing the gospel, Christ promises that He, at the cross, will draw all men unto Himself. Every human being will be drawn to Him. It doesn't matter if you're a muslim, hindu, atheist, agnostic, or new-age believer. It doesn't matter

what religion or background you're from. You might be an Eskimo, or a native from a remote region that the missionary has never seen, but Christ says that He will draw all men unto Himself. He does this by His Spirit, working upon the conscience. Indeed, every man has been given a knowledge of right from wrong. And by Christ's Spirit, working upon their conscience, He is seeking to draw them to Himself.

The reason why Nicodemus had to be born again is because while he was obeying God, he was doing it out of necessity. Many in the church today are doing good things for the same reason. That's what develops this relationship of 'sin and repent'. A man is trying to obey God by his own strength, so sometimes he fails. That's called works. The motive is wrong. Let me show you an example.

Q. Why do most people go to work?

A. Out of necessity.

They have bills to pay, they need food to eat. Ultimately, they have needs. But what happens when people win big lotteries? What's the first thing they generally do? They stop working. Their needs are met now. People work because of their needs.

Nicodemus was working to get to heaven. His need was heaven. His motive was selfishness. Jesus showed him that his motive was wrong. That's why he had to be born again.

You see, you can do a lot of good things and still be selfish. Nicodemus did many good things, but they were done from a wrong motive. The Bible says:

"And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not [love], it profiteth me nothing." 1 Corinthians 13:3.

When you serve someone out of love, you don't expect anything in re-

turn. The book of Genesis describes how “Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her.” Genesis 29:20. In the book of Romans, Paul proclaims:

“For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh:” Romans 9:3

The kinsmen which Paul refers to here were the Jews who hated him. For all intents and purposes, they were his biggest enemies. Yet Paul wishes that he could be cut off from eternity that they might be saved. What is his reward there? What is his payment? There’s no reward. No payment. He does it out of love.

Why do loving parents do things for their children? Do the children pay them? Can the children pay them? Why do parents make sacrifices? Why do they go without so long as their children can be fed and clothed? Why does a loving wife do things for her husband and the husband do things for his wife? To be paid? No, they do it out of love.

I have an aunty in Italy who is over eighty years old. She never married. She was a very attractive young woman with a beautiful personality. She never married because she devoted her entire life to looking after her mother, my grandmother. Her mother died at 99 years old, and my aunty looked after her her entire life. She sacrificed everything to care for her mother. And she cared for her till her last breath. There was no hospital, no nursing care. She would pick her up, she would wash her, and she would feed her. And she did it till her mother’s last breath with absolute joy.

Several years ago, my mother went to Italy to give her a break. And my mum was no slouch. Few women worked as hard as she did in her life. But she could not do what her sister did. My mother would break down in tears when talking about the love her sister had for her mother. That’s service from love. It doesn’t want anything in return.

Nicodemus had to be transformed from serving God out of necessity, to serving him out of appreciation. Do you know how it happened? Through John 3:14.

“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up:” John 3:14

“And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all [men] unto me.” John 12:32

When Nicodemus saw Jesus at Calvary, he was drawn unto Him. From then, Nicodemus was not the same man. He had witnessed the Son of God hanging on a cross. He had seen the Creator of the universe dying for him. And his motives were changed.

We often quote John 3:16, but studied it in the context of this conversation, it's especially powerful. Remember, the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus began with Nicodemus' statement:

“Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him”. John 3:2.

Thus, when Jesus speaks the words of John 3:16, he's saying to Nicodemus: ‘I'm not just some Rabbi. I'm not some great teacher. I am the only begotten Son of God.’

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” John 3:16

Nicodemus saw the Son of God dying for him and dying for the world. And he realised that all his good works couldn't save him. He remembered the words of Jesus that shadowy night three years before. He remembered Jesus' promise that “whosoever believeth in him should

not perish". And it was then that Inspiration says, Nicodemus saw his need of a saviour.

"He saw that the most rigid obedience to the mere letter of the law as applied to the outward life could entitle no man to enter the kingdom of heaven." (Ellen White, *The Desire of Ages*, 174.)

Why did Nicodemus realise his need at the cross? Because of the prophecy given in John 3:14.

"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up:" John 3:14

Consider once more the life of Alexander the Great. No army or soldier could kill him. What killed him was sin. Alexander continually obeyed that law of self till at the last, he was so drunk that he choked to death on his own vomit. He was a debauched and immoral man. His lusts could not be filled. Alexander the Great died a total captive.

Yet whether it's an outwardly immoral man or someone with a seemingly faultless character is irrelevant. If Nicodemus wasn't drawn to Christ at the cross, he too would be lost. The Lord called the Scribes and Pharisees "whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness."

Matthew 23:27

You see, when a snake bites you, it's not the bite that kills you but the poison it injects. Incidentally, Australia has the top four deadliest snakes in the world. And the deadliest snake in the world is called the Inland Taipan. Its toxicity is so high that if you get bitten by an Inland Taipan and don't receive help, in a few hours you're sure to be dead. You cannot be saved outside of a miracle of God. That's how venomous this snake is.

Now, you may be wondering why a deadly serpent was used as a sym-

bol of Christ. In order to understand this, you have to first understand how the cure for a snake-bite is obtained.

The remedy for snake venom is anti-venom, which comes from a snake. The poison is milked out of a snake and then injected it into a healthy horse in small doses. The horse immediately develops antibodies to neutralise the poison. Then, blood is taken out of the horse, purified, and injected into the victim. Now you have anti-venom made from the venom. And that's what heals you. The very thing which was killing you now becomes the means of saving your life.

It was the law of sin that killed Alexander, and which will also kill us if we don't surrender. This is the venom of the serpent. It's the law of sin. The moment you enter into this world you're subject to that law. It means that self wants to reign. So the only way that Christ could save you from this poison is to become subject to the same poison Himself. He had to be made subject to that law of sin in the flesh; the sinful, fallen nature under which every soul is born into the world. Then, Christ had to purify it by living a perfect life and never once letting it rule. And so He developed the anti-venom to it. The anti-venom to sin is the law of the Spirit.

Although Christ was injected with the poison of sin (a sinful nature) He never once was infected by it. How could that be? Because nature is not sin! You don't have to teach the immaculate conception. You don't even have to change Christ's nature because nature is not sin. Christ was injected with the same venom which we inherit. How else was He going to develop the antibody to it? How can He help you if He didn't partake of what you had? Christ inherited our same sinful, fallen nature. But He was never once infected by it. He killed it. When did He kill it? Upon the cross.

"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all [men] unto me." John 12:32

Jesus had to live a perfect life for thirty-three and a half years. Even on the cross, He could have sinned. He had to die in faith. He took sinful fallen nature to the cross, and He purified that nature. He purified that life and neutralised the poison of sin. And so He built the perfect antibody to the poison. The Lord Jesus came out of the tomb glorified. That's why sin no longer needs to have a hold over the Christian. Sin has been defeated. The anti-venom has been made.

Christ had to take part of our same flesh and blood. He had to take part of our same sinful nature, that same poison which was killing the people of Israel. He had to partake of it in order to develop the resistance against it.

Come back with me to Hebrews 2:14 where we began.

“Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil;” Hebrews 2:14

Satan's power over us is the law of sin, realised the moment one gives into it by sinning. And sin results in death (1 Corinthians 15:56). Christ had to partake of that law in order to destroy it. Yet He never once gave into it. He never once sinned. Look at the next verse.

“And deliver them who through fear of death were all their life-time subject to bondage.” Hebrews 2:15

That's how Christ delivers us from sin. Having partaken of our very nature, and being subject to the same poison, Jesus developed a perfect life. That's why the Bible talks so much about Christ's blood. Consider these four examples.

“...Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood,” Revelation 1:5

“How much more shall the blood of Christ... purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” Hebrews 9:14

“...and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.”
1 John 1:7

“Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate.” Hebrews 13:12

Christ’s blood has the power to cleanse us from dead works as it did in Nicodemus. It washes us from our sins and sanctifies us. Christ’s blood (His perfect life) carries the antidote.

In John chapter 6, Christ gave a sermon in which He said that He was the living bread, and whoseover eats His body and drinks His blood will see eternal life. However, almost the entire church turned away from it. They said: “This is an hard saying; who can hear it?” John 6:60. But they knew what Jesus was saying. They simply weren’t prepared to live the life that He lived; a life of self-sacrifice.

When we partake of the communion service, we often don’t realise what we’re partaking of. That’s why you can bring condemnation on yourself by partaking of it unworthily. For when you partake of the communion service, you’re partaking of the life of Christ. And the life of Christ is a life of poverty and self-sacrifice. It’s a life where the Son of man had nowhere to lay his head. So people are partaking of the communion but they don’t want to partake of His life. That’s why they go away just as these brethren did. Jesus was continually telling them:

“...Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him.” John 6:53-56

The Christian must partake of Christ's life fully and completely because He is the only one who can cleanse them from sin; from the poison of the serpent. As the apostle Paul states:

"The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" 1 Corinthians 10:16

That's why there's power in the communion service when correctly understood. By partaking of the bread and the wine, you're accepting Christ's victory as your own. You're partaking of His blood which has defeated the law of sin, and which cleanses one from sin! That perfect life that Jesus lived becomes yours. In Christ's blood, you receive the victory over sin.

During the reformation, the communion service was one of the biggest controversies. This is because Satan knows that when the communion service is correctly understood and practised, there will be a tremendous revival. This is why it's been counterfeited for such a long time.

Returning to the title of our message, Sister White comments on why the image of a deadly serpent was chosen to represent Christ.

"The people well knew that in itself the serpent had no power to help them. It was a symbol of Christ. As the image made in the likeness of the destroying serpents was lifted up for their healing, so One made "in the likeness of sinful flesh" was to be their Redeemer. Romans 8:3." (Ellen White, *The Desire of Ages*, 175.)

What a beautiful truth we've learnt! A truth not well understood for over two thousand years. Only Inspiration could reveal to us the real lesson of the raising up of the brazen serpent. Sister White connects Numbers 21:8-9 with Romans 8:3. The "image made in the likeness of the destroying serpents" was a symbol of the "One made 'in the likeness of sinful flesh'"!

You see friends, it was not really the poisonous serpents that were killing the people in the wilderness. It was their sins. The serpents were just a consequence of the Israelites' rebellion. Their healing could only take place by finding a cure for their sins. They had to look by faith to the One "made in the likeness of sinful flesh". The only One who had the antidote for their sins. This is why Sister White connects Numbers 21:8-9 with Romans 8:3.

When the Israelites were looking to the serpent in faith, they were looking to Christ. And so we are to look by faith to the One who can give us victory over sin, having partaken of our same disease (sinful nature), and yet living a victorious life and conquering the tomb and all satanic agencies. It was the serpent that was nailed to the cross. It was the law of sin which was condemned.

"For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh:" Romans 8:3

The law could never produce the righteousness that was required because of the weakness in the flesh; the law of sin. Yet God sent His Son in that same fallen flesh. And what did He do? He condemned sin in the flesh!

That's why He commands us to eat of His body and partake of His blood. His blood has been purified, and it's transfused to us by faith. As we look and live, we know that He has the antidote for our sins. That's what Nicodemus had to do. He had to stop looking to his works, to the church, and to all the people who were praising him for how well he was doing. The Bible says that the sting resulting in death is sin. 1 Corinthians 15:56. But the next verse says: "But thanks [be] to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ". 1 Corinthians 15:57.

After relaying the story of Nicodemus in the 17th chapter of *The Desire*

of Ages, Sister White poses the question:

“How, then, are we to be saved? “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness,” so the Son of man has been lifted up, and everyone who has been deceived and bitten by the serpent may look and live. “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” John 1:29. The light shining from the cross reveals the love of God. His love is drawing us to Himself. If we do not resist this drawing, we shall be led to the foot of the cross in repentance for the sins that have crucified the Saviour. Then the Spirit of God through faith produces a new life in the soul. The thoughts and desires are brought into obedience to the will of Christ. The heart, the mind, are created anew in the image of Him who works in us to subdue all things to Himself. Then the law of God is written in the mind and heart, and we can say with Christ, “I delight to do Thy will, O my God.”” Psalm 40:8. (Ellen White, *The Desire of Ages*, 175)

The name ‘Nicodemus’ means ‘victory of the people’. When Nicodemus beheld Christ dying for him, he beheld not only the One who died for his sins but the very One who could save him from his sins. Nicodemus was drawn to him, and this time, he didn’t resist.

“His love is drawing us to Himself. If we do not resist this drawing, we shall be led to the foot of the cross in repentance for the sins that have crucified the Saviour. Then the Spirit of God through faith produces a new life in the soul.” (Ellen White, *The Desire of Ages*, 175.)

This is what happened to Nicodemus. All his wealth, all his knowledge, all his time, were once again consecrated to God’s service. But this time, it was not out of necessity. This time, it was from love. Nicodemus lived and died for one thing, and that was Christ. In fact, *The Desire of Ages* declares that he had much greater faith than the disciples. For at the cross, they all doubted, but Nicodemus did not. At the cross,

Nicodemus knew who Jesus was. He remembered their conversation. He remembered Christ's words; look and live.

Imagine yourself alone in a desert, having just been bitten by a venomous serpent. Suddenly, a man arrives who happens to have the anti-venom. He approaches you and offers to treat your snake-bite. What do you do? Do you ask to be told the science behind the process while you're perishing right before him? Certainly not. Without any hesitancy, you're going to beg for that remedy to be injected into your blood as soon as possible.

When Sister White speaks about Moses lifting up the serpent in the wilderness, she admonishes us not to inquire as to how the Spirit works, as to the science of it all. We cannot understand these things. Our only instruction is to look and live. To believe that Jesus has the antidote for our problems, and to look to all that He's done for us. Then we're to take it to the foot of the cross. For there, you'll no longer want to live for self. There, you'll serve Him out of love, and all your works will bear meaning. When at that point, we - individually and as a church - experience a conversion like Nicodemus did, the world will see the 'victory of the people'.

For more information:

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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

**What does it mean to be converted?
What nature did Jesus receive on Earth?
How can I partake of Christ’s life?**

In the book of Numbers lies the intriguing true story about a serpent of brass. Written by Moses, the story contains a lesson which wasn’t wholly understood until fifteen-hundred years after it took place; during a private conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus.

Today, another two-thousand years after that evening interview, we’re going to learn another beautiful truth from this same incredible prophetic story.

