

"Lifted Up" on a Cross



Numbers 21:4-9 Gal 3:10-14 John 3:1-21

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Why was Jesus crucified?

Why wasn't He beheaded, or run through with a sword, or thrown off a cliff, strangled, drowned, or sent to the Roman Coliseum to fight the wild animals? Those were common ways that the Roman Empire killed their enemies. *Why was Jesus crucified?*

Jesus was crucified because crucifixion was the sign that a man was cursed. Here's how St. Paul explains it:

Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree") Galatians 3:13

To the Jewish eye, when Jesus hung on the cross, He was cursed by God. Jesus carried the curse of our sin upon Himself; and His crucifixion is a *public and visual* representation that He truly was cursed by God. Jesus hung on a cross, crucified, cursed by God *for us and in our place*¹.

When Jesus cried out from the cross, **"It Is Finished!"** one of the things He meant is that **the curse of sin is finished!** You are no longer **cursed by God**, but you are **blessed by God** through His Son Jesus Christ! **The curse of sin is finished!**

¹ One scholar had this interesting thought: the sign of the curse of sin in Genesis 3 was nakedness; Adam and Eve were hiding in the bushes because they were naked. When Jesus took the curse of sin upon Himself, He was probably naked on the cross. The humiliation He went through was total and thorough – all because of His love for you!

In the Old Testament, there was a foreshadow that Jesus would be crucified. It's the story of Moses lifting up a bronze snake on a pole to save the rebellious Israelites from poisonous snake bites. We heard the story today from the Old Testament lesson.

The Israelites constantly complained against God and His servant Moses in the Wilderness after the Exodus, and finally the Lord had had enough! That day, the Lord judged the peoples' sins by sending poisonous snakes into their camp. The day of grace was over for many people that day. But the faithful Israelites repented, they confessed their sins, and called out to God for help. God, in His grace, heard their prayer and He provided a way for them to live. For those who looked at the bronze snake that Moses lifted up, and believed God's promise that they would live, the poisonous snake bites were harmless. God provided a way of salvation for His People. **By believing God's promise of life in the snake on the pole that was lifted over them, the people lived.**

That bronze snake on a pole was a **type** of Christ²: it **foreshadowed** what Jesus would do for us³! Jesus uses the story of the bronze snake in the Old Testament to teach us about Himself and His work of salvation for us.

[Jesus said,] Just as Moses lifted up **the snake in the desert**, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in Him may have eternal life. **John 3:14-15**

Jesus is the way of salvation that God has provided for us! We don't look to a bronze snake lifted up on a pole, but rather we look to the Son of God lifted up on the cross. That's where our salvation is found!

The reality is that everyone of us has been **snake bitten**; not by a poisonous snake, but by sin. **The same snake that was in the Garden of Eden is also in our**

² Ironically, this is the only place in Scripture where Jesus is compared to a snake! Usually, Satan is associated with a snake (Gen 3, Rev 12), but here it is a visual image of Jesus, who like that snake on a pole, was lifted up on a cross for all people to be healed from sin! The "lifting up" of the snake — like Jesus was "lifted up" on the cross — is the key comparison! (The snake was used because it was snakes that were killing the people in the story.)

³ This use of an Old Testament story is called a "type" that points to Jesus --> Jesus replaces the OT "type" so He is the "antitype" – (anti = "in the place of"). It is similar to the English word "foreshadow" where the second thing is greater than the first.

lives; Satan leads us into temptation, sin, guilt and shame. Like the people in the Old Testament story, we **complain** against God; we are **unhappy, discontent, unsatisfied**; we **slander** and **gossip**; we **criticize** and **grumble** about other people; **rebellion** is seen in our lives. We deserve to have poisonous snakes biting each of us. We all have been **bitten** by sin; and we will all die unless God provides a way for us to live.

And God does provide a way to live! *Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in Him may have eternal life.*

God provided a way of salvation for you in His Son Jesus Christ. God Himself rescues you from the poison of sin. Jesus was lifted up on a cross so that your sins would be forgiven, and that you would be spared death because of your sins. Because Jesus was “lifted up” on a cross, God promises to forgive you, heal you, and give you eternal life! You will not die in your sins! You have been given life in Christ!

God provided a rescue from sin for you: **today believe it!** In the Old Testament story, everyone could see the snake on the pole, but only those who **believed** what God said about it were healed and lived⁴.

It's the same today with the cross. Everyone can see the cross, in fact, there are crosses everywhere --> from jewelry to art to tattoos! Crosses are everywhere! But not everyone **believes** what God says about the cross. By faith, we trust God's promise that Jesus is the One God sent to rescue you from sin; that Jesus was “**lifted up**” on a cross to rescue you from sin and death. In Him, you will live and not die!

Believe that you have life because the only begotten Son of God was **lifted up**! Here are some promises that you can trust:

⁴ UNFORTUNATELY, this bronze snake on a pole turns up again in the Old Testament... this time as an idol! It seems that some of the Israelites kept this bronze snake on a pole as a relic, called it “Nehushtan” (= “bronze thing”), and worshipped it. Read the unfortunate story in 2 Kings 18:1-4.

[Jesus said] "I tell you the truth, whoever hears My Word and **believes** Him who sent Me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life. John 5:24

Jesus said to her, "I am the Resurrection and the Life. He who **believes** in Me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and **believes** in Me will never die. John 11:25-26

But these are written that you may **believe** that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by **believing** you may have life in His Name. John 20:31

God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him. Whoever **believes** in Him is not condemned, John 3:14-18

Today believe that Jesus is the One that God sent to rescue you from sin and death! God has saved you from the poison of death by lifting up His Son Jesus Christ on a cross⁵!

Finally, one more thing.

There's an interesting reversal with this *lifted up* idea.

Jesus was *lifted up in death* on a cross for you; and now, by faith in Him, ***you*** will be *lifted up in life* on the Last Day. Your body will be *lifted up out of the grave* and you will live forever in the Kingdom of Heaven in a resurrected and glorified body. This is what we mean when we confess that we believe in the **Resurrection of the dead** and the life everlasting! *Jesus dies so that you can live forever!* As Jesus was *lifted up in death*, you will be *lifted up in life* on the Last Day.

We are now in the middle of Lent; and the essence of Lent is that we are *lifting up our eyes to the cross* in order to see the one that God *lifted up for us and our salvation*.

Today, may you always lift up your eyes to Jesus and believe His promises, He is the only One who rescues you from death and gives you eternal life.

Amen!

⁵ Jesus returns to this Old Testament image of "lifting up" in two other places: in John 8:28 "Jesus said, "When you have **lifted up** the Son of Man, then you will know that I AM [the One I claim to be]. And again in John 12:32: "When I am **lifted up** from the earth, I will draw all men to Myself."

God the Father, we thank You for Your great love for us that You sent Your Son to be our Savior, knowing that He would be lifted up on a cross and crucified for us and our salvation. Send us the Holy Spirit so that we may look to Christ in faith and believe. Deepen our conviction and confidence so that we can live with assurance and peace throughout our lives. We ask this in the Name of Jesus who is lifted up for us, Amen .

Numbers 21:4-9

They traveled from Mount Hor along the route to the Red Sea, to go around Edom. But the people grew impatient on the way; 5 they spoke against God and against Moses, and said, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!" 6 Then the LORD sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died. 7 The people came to Moses and said, "We sinned when we spoke against the LORD and against you. Pray that the LORD will take the snakes away from us." So Moses prayed for the people. 8 The LORD said to Moses, "Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live." 9 So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, he lived.

Galatians 3:10-14

10 For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.” 11 But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for “the just shall live by faith.” 12 Yet the law is not of faith, but “the man who does them shall live by them.”

13 Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”), 14 that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

John 3:1-21

Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. 2 He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him." 3 In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again. " 4 "How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!" 5 Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. 6 Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. 7 You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' 8 The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit." 9 "How can this be?" Nicodemus asked. 10 "You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things? 11 I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. 12 I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? 13 No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven--the Son of Man. 14 Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, 15 that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. 16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. 18 "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. 19 And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. 20 For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. 21 But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."