

One of my mentors used to say: “You can tell a lot about a man by watching his eyes.” Think about that. “You can tell a lot about a man (a lot about a person) by watching [their] eyes.” What we set our eyes on often reveals what we value and what we are chasing after. One look can lead to a foolish decision or a really wisely decision. One look can produce an opportunity or a roadblock. One look can lead to joy or despair. Just one look. So let me ask you this morning . . .

What entices you? What do you fix your gaze on?

This is true in a literal sense. It is also true in a metaphorical sense. What is your personal vision? What values and dreams guide the daily details your life?

The same is true of a church. We have attempted to set our eyes on Christ and his revealed Word, expected great things from him, and have gone to work by his grace! It is amazing what God has done in such a short time!

“Great are the works of the Lord, studied by all who delight in them.” (Psalm 111:2) “Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable.” (Psalm 145:3)

God desires for us to be captivated by a vision of his greatness and experience all the benefits that flow from a relationship with him. This morning we’re going to spend some time in Numbers 21, and see a powerful story that will encourage us to do one thing and experience one massive result.

**The Point: Look! and live.**

Look! That’s it. Look to God’s provision and live. Numbers 21 and the verses it points to in John 3 are going to teach us about God’s true & greater salvation.

### **“The True & Greater Salvation” Numbers 21:4-9; John 3:1-18**

Context: In the wilderness... Aaron died. . . After a story of victory, we have trouble again in the Hebrew camp. This story is going to encourage us to look in two directions. #1 . . .

#### **I. Look and see the brokenness around us and within us (21:4-7).**

*Read 4-7.* Story: They had to travel around Edom. They were forced to back track traveling southeast rather than northwest. No one enjoys that. In fact, if you’re anything like me, you’re trying to find the quickest route. . . Additionally, the people were hungry, thirsty, and irritated and as they traveled, *their eyes were pulled away from God and his goodness*, which led them to grumble and complain against God. We have observed this all too-familiar refrain throughout this series (Exodus 15-16; Numbers 13; Here we are Again!).

#### **The people sin against God.**

- They started focusing on their circumstances and made a startling revelation: They are not that great! Perhaps this is you today. Your job isn’t that great. Relationships are a mess. Can hardly pay the bills.
- You should not have to read the Bible to know: the world we live in is fundamentally broken. We see brokenness all around us. Even the conversations I’ve had over the past few days:

- Corruption in the workplace. Dissension and friction in relationships. The nasty effects of addictions that assail so many.
- But here's our problem. We make an incredibly unwise leap and start projecting our experience on God. We go from the stuff of earth, this troubled world, and then disgusted, we look up and say, "God you must not be that great."
- Verse 4 is crucial. "And the people became impatient on the way."
- One of our biggest problems is lacking patience. Oftentimes, we believe God will come through, but we don't like his timetable (Watch).
- Numbers 21 tells us there is a connection between our patience and our perspective. We can't always see where God is taking us, but that is why we are called to a life of faith.
- Zoom out... He's in control. He's taking us somewhere, namely in this story, the Promised Land!
- And if you are in Christ, here's a little spoiler alert, the story ends with us in the Promised Land!
- Their lack of patience and lack of perspective led them to distrust and speak out against God and against Moses. P
- Once again they irrationally preferred slavery in Egypt over freedom in the desert. They questioned God's power, wisdom, and faithfulness.
- They called the manna God rained down from heaven, ["the bread of angels" as it is called in Psalm 78:25,] "worthless bread." It does not get much stronger than that.
- Now, I'm sure no one in here has ever questioned God! No one ever becomes impatient with God. You're so holy and righteous that you would never do such a thing! But if you have, you may want to listen carefully to this story. Why? Well verse 6 gives us one really good reason.

### **Sin carries great consequences.**

- *"Then the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many of the people of Israel died."*
- Sin always brings pain. God can send manna, BUT God can also send snakes. Instead of enjoying the blessing of bread from heaven, Israel was dying from serpents in the desert.
- These were "fiery serpents." It can be translated out "the snakes that produce burning." The burning, of course, was in their poisonous venom. That's why some translations say "venomous snakes." These bites probably led to "horrible, agonizing deaths." (Allen, EBC)
- Have you ever been bitten by a spider? Not a lot of fun. A snake? This is not a great way to celebrate an anniversary, is it? Men, when you take your woman out to celebrate an anniversary this is not probably a talking point that will be embraced with great excitement.
- Nevertheless, sometimes we have to hear the bad news before we can understand how good the good news truly is.
- Doctors understand this. They call it diagnosis. God's prescription, while it may seem extreme, was actually fueled with kindness... How can you say that? Everything God does he does to glorify himself and draw people to himself. You follow me? God wanted to awaken people to the folly of their ways, so he disciplined them in order to draw them back toward faith.

### **The people recognize their sin and {P} cry for deliverance.**

- Most people go through life with the underlying attitude that goes something like this: "I'm straight. I'm all set. I got this!" Preposterous!
- Thankfully, through this choice discipline, Israel recognized they were not all set.

- Check Verse 7: “And the people came to Moses and said, ‘We have sinned against the Lord and against you. Pray to the Lord, that he take away the serpents from us.’ So Moses prayed for the people.”
- In order to have a relationship with God, you must see your need!
- Cars... Making Noise, not running smooth . . . Tires... Alignment . . .

T: So would God save them out of this predicament? If so, how would he get it done? How would he set them straight, in the best possible use of the term?

## II. Look and see the healing God provides those who believe (21:8-9; John 3:1-18).

“And the Lord said to Moses, ‘Make a fiery serpent....’ {P} Let’s stop. Does this sound good? The serpents have been killing them, and God says make a fiery serpent” [Doesn’t sound too good. But it goes on to say:] “Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live.” So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.”

- Surprisingly, God did not immediately remove the serpents. The serpents were still among them. But God did provide a means of healing and deliverance. When anyone is bitten, they were to look to the serpent and they would be healed. These people, moving toward a certain death, experienced healing through the power of God.
- This is one of the central meanings for salvation. The Greek word *sozo* means rescue, deliver, heal, make whole.
- They needed a remedy for the consequences of their sin, and God always provides a remedy, but this time it was a strange and unusual provision. A bronze snake.
- Now, if this seems strange to us, it must have been shocking, even scandalous to the Israelites. Why?
- 1) The symbol of death becomes a source of life.
- 2) The symbol of their present suffering and even evil itself (Genesis 3), now becomes their source of righteousness and healing.

T: Does this sound familiar? Life through death. The lifting up of God’s provision that we might have life. Turn with me to John 3. In Numbers, we see God bring physical healing. Now in a conversation Jesus has with a religious leader named Nicodemus, we will find the provision of God’s eternal, spiritual healing.

### John 3

- Summarize 1-8. Born again. Nicodemus . . . story . .
- Read 9-13. Summarize.. .
- **"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life." (John 3:14-15)**
- This of course is an allusion to the cross of Christ and his future exaltation. Lifted up.. = Cross

What happens on the *scandalous* cross? Jesus was **lifted up. Beaten, mocked, humiliated, shamed, and disgraced, he was lifted up for the salvation of the world.**

- **Gal. 3:13 “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.’”**

- **“But he was *pierced for our transgressions; was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.*” (Isaiah 53:4-5)**
- Do you need healing today? Look to Christ. Have you looked to the work of Christ on your behalf? Some of you today have never trusted in Christ and you are unsure of your eternal destination. Let me tell you: there is no one so bad here today that they are beyond God’s salvation, and there is no one so good who does not need God’s salvation.
- The world cries, “foolish!” The church cries, “wisdom!” The world cries “weakness.” The church cries “power!” salvation!” (1 Cor. 1:18ff)
- Which leads to what is perhaps the most famous verse in the Bible: *What drives this Gift of Life? Answer. Love!*
- **“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should have eternal life.” (John 3:16)**
- God loves... He expresses this love in a gift. . . . The gift is his Son. . . . The gift is for whoever believes . . . . Whoever believes has eternal life.
- What does it mean to believe?
  - Oh, I believe in Jesus. When Israel looked to the bronze serpent, they were looking with the belief that God would heal them through that means of provision.
  - ??Honey/Edwards... Have you tasted of his sweetness?
  - Have you given your life to him?
  - They same is true for us through God’s true and greater means of salvation.
- When someone believes they move, Jesus says “crosses over/passes from death to life.” They have eternal life. Now, here’s the thought going through most of your minds. I probably need to get things straight with Jesus (I hope you are thinking that) and primarily so that my eternal destination is set. That is absolutely true. But we must understand eternal life begins the moment you look to Christ!
- Let me explain: Eternal life begins the moment someone is born of the Spirit.
- There’s life, and then there’s LIFE! Someone may be living and breathing, but not be fully ALIVE! We find life as we find it in God. “I have come that they have life, abundant life” (Jn. 10:10)
- To live life apart from Christ is to be numbered among the walking dead.

This is why Jesus came. That all might look to him and live!

**“And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” (John 12:32)**

Have you looked to Christ? We look. We live. Simple as that. And how often do we look... Every day! Every hour. Every moment. **“For every one look at self, and circumstance, take a TEN THOUSAND looks at Christ.”**

What will drive your life to vibrancy, joy, flourishing? A vision of Christ. What will drive this church to another 3 years, 30 years, 300 years to health, growth, multiplication? A vision of Christ!

We desire to be a church that is amazed by God’s great love and compelled by God’s great love. (3<sup>rd</sup> Anniversary) Captured by a vision of the Greatness of God. Compelled by the fuel of the Love of God. and give this love away.

- The power of Christ and love of Christ changes our 9 to 5, changes our marriages, our friendships, changes everything! We have seen God do so many things! The best is yet to come!

T: This morning I want to invite you to insert yourself into the story of Israel. Insert yourself into the shoes of Nicodemus.

**Conclusion: Spurgeon's Conversion...**

"I sometimes think I might have been in darkness and despair until now had it not been for the goodness of God in sending a snowstorm, one Sunday morning, while I was going to a certain place of worship. When I could go no further, I turned down a side street, and came to a little Primitive Methodist Chapel. In that chapel there may have been a dozen or fifteen people. I had heard of the Primitive Methodists, how they sang so loudly that they made people's heads ache; but that did not matter to me. I wanted to know how I might be saved, and if they could tell me that, I did not care how much they made my head ache. The minister did not come that morning; he was snowed up, I suppose. At last, a very thin-looking man, a shoemaker, or tailor, or something of that sort, went up into the pulpit to preach. Now, it is well that preachers should be instructed; but this man was really stupid. He was obliged to stick to his text, for the simple reason that he had little else to say. The text was,--'

LOOK UNTO ME, AND BE YE SAVED, ALL THE ENDS OF THE EARTH. [Isaiah 45:22KIV](#)

He did not even pronounce the words rightly, but that did not matter. There was, I thought, a glimpse of hope for me in that text. The preacher began thus:--'

'My dear friends, this is a very simple text indeed. It says, 'Look.' Now lookin' don't take a deal of pains. It ain't liftin' your foot or your finger; it is just, 'Look.' Well, a man needn't go to College to learn to look. You may be the biggest fool, and yet you can look. A man needn't be worth a thousand a year to be able to look. Anyone can look; even a child can look. But then the text says, 'Look unto Me.' Ay!" said he, in broad Essex, "Many on ye are lookin' to yourselves, but it's no use lookin' there. You'll never find any comfort in yourselves. Some look to God the Father. No, look to Him by-and-by. Jesus Christ says, 'Look unto Me.' Some on ye say, 'We must wait for the Spirit's workin'.' You have no business with that just now. Look to Christ. The text says, 'Look unto Me.' "

Then the good man followed up his text in this way:--

"Look unto Me; I am sweatin' great drops of blood. Look unto Me; I am hangin' on the cross. Look unto Me; I am dead and buried. Look unto Me; I rise again. Look unto Me; I ascend to Heaven. Look unto Me; I am sittin' at the Father's right hand. O poor sinner, look unto Me! Look unto Me!"

When he had gone to about that length, and managed to spin out ten minutes or so, he was at the end of his tether. Then he looked at me under the gallery, and I daresay, with so few present, he knew me to be a stranger. Just fixing his eyes on me, as if he knew all my heart, he said,

"Young man, you look very miserable."

Well, I did; but I had not been accustomed to have remarks made from the pulpit on my personal appearance before. However, it was a good blow, struck right home. He continued,

"and you always will be miserable--miserable in life, and miserable in death,--if you don't obey my text; but if you obey now, this moment, you will be saved."

Then, lifting up his hands, he shouted, as only a Primitive Methodist could do,

"You man, look to Jesus Christ. Look! Look! Look! You have nothin' to do but to look and live."

I saw at once the way of salvation. I know not what else he said,--I did not take much notice of it -- I was so possessed with that one thought. Like as when the brazen serpent was lifted up, the people only looked and were healed, so it was with me. I had been waiting to do fifty things, but when I heard that word, "Look!" what a charming word it seemed to me! Oh! I looked until I could almost have looked my eyes away. There and then the cloud was gone, the darkness had rolled away, and that moment I saw the sun; and I could have risen that instant, and sung with the most enthusiastic of them, of the precious blood of Christ, and simple faith which looks alone to Him. Oh, that somebody had told me this before, "Trust Christ, and you shall be saved.""