

## The Foot of the Cross

### A Life-look at the Foot of the Cross

By Octavius Winslow

"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

It was a prominent and beautiful feature in our Lord's ministrations, that He never expended a single moment in disputation upon the mere outworks of Christianity. His whole life intent upon saving man, not a second of that life was spent in discussing ecclesiastical questions, sacraments, and forms. They never came within the scope of His ministrations save as positive institutions, and gospel commands. And when, through the subtlety of Satan and of error, men sought, by speculative questions, to divert His mind from His grand purpose- for example, inquiring, "Are there few that be saved?" -with a skill and adroitness peculiar to Himself, the heavenly Teacher, He instantly concentrated their thoughts upon the great essential and personal matters of their salvation, and exclaimed, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate." The narrative before us is a striking instance of this. There came to Him a ruler of the synagogue under the veil of night, evidently with a mind under deep religious excitement. Our Lord did not give a direct answer to the admission of His divine authority as a Teacher, but instantly brought to bear upon the mind of the inquirer the great question of his regeneration, and pressed him with that most momentous of all momentous truths, "Unless a man be *born again*, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." Confronted, in communicating this doctrine, by apparent obtuseness of mind and hardness of heart in Nicodemus, the Savior cites a fact in the history of his own nation which would be familiar to his mind, and which would at once illustrate the truth. To Nicodemus's inquiry, "How can these things be?" our Lord instantly recalls to his memory the fact of Moses lifting up the serpent in the wilderness, and by that well-known and impressive incident He sought to elucidate to the mind of the Jew the divinely appointed way by which a poor, serpent-stung sinner could be healed, justified, and eternally saved. The subject is replete with gospel truth, yes, it is the very marrow of the gospel itself. May the Spirit of truth be our Teacher!

We will, in the discussion of the subject, consider the points of coincidence between the emblem, and the gospel truth it is designed to illustrate and teach. "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."

We commence with THE SERPENT'S STING. We need not remind the reader that in this particular the parallel is complete. The sting of this fiery serpent was venomous. The virus, instantly it was produced; insinuated itself into the system, and certain and almost immediate death was the consequence. With the speculative question touching the origin of sin we have nothing to do. I believe it to be one of Satan's subtleties for withdrawing attention from the actual existence, sinfulness, and fatality of sin itself, the progress of which, if not arrested, terminates in all the bitter pangs and miserable horrors of the "second death." The natural fascination of the serpent is proverbial. The moral fascination of sin is yet more so. Its spell binds men's souls in its serpent coil; and if Satan can but succeed in entangling men's minds with the question, "Why was sin introduced into the world?" he has succeeded in diverting their thoughts from the solemn and momentous fact of their personal fall and actual apostasy from God. Beware of attempting to be wiser than the Bible, wiser than the God of the Bible. You have to do, not with the question, why sin was permitted, or where its mysterious origin? The matter you have to do with is, the momentous one of your personal sting by the great serpent the devil; and that if that sting is not extracted, its moral venom arrested, the deep wound healed, then the blackness of despair will brood around your deathless soul forever. O sin, it is a terrible thing! It has left no part of the physical, moral, and intellectual nature of man untouched. Man is *originally* a sinner. "Behold, I was shaped in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me." In sin he lives, in sin he grows up, in sin he dies, if God's grace is not interposed, if Christ's salvation is not received, welcomed, and believed in. The saints of God feel it. Ask them what wrings the bitterest tear from their eye and the deepest sigh from their hearts? All will acknowledge, "It is sin that dwells in me. Rid me of this, restore to me my original purity, make me perfectly holy, and you make me perfectly happy. It is not the loss of property, nor the sadness of bereavement, that shades and furrows my brow; it is that I feel rankling within my breast the virus of sin, prompting and inciting my wicked heart of unbelief to depart from my God."

We must not here overlook the utter failure of *Moses* to cure that wound. Stretching far around the camp lay these bitten, dying Israelites. Moses had no power to meet the case. What a gospel truth is illustrated here! There are many sensible of the poison of sin in their hearts, convicted of sin by the Spirit of God, who yet are looking to the *law* for justification, to their *works* instead of their believing; going to *Moses* instead of Jesus; attempting to transform the instrument of condemnation and death into an instrument of justification and life; merging the gospel into the law. But no healing, my reader, will you find here! Were you to give all your goods to feed the poor, and your body to be burned, the law of God could never give you healing; you must come away from Mount Sinai, before which Moses quaked and trembled, and you must travel to Mount Calvary, where the Incarnate God offers pardon and whispers peace to every humble penitent.

A second point of coincidence is found in THE INSTRUMENT OF HEALING. The

first question is, *With whom did this mode of healing originate?* Was it with the wisdom and benevolence of Moses, or was it with the wisdom and benevolence of God? Was it human or divine? natural or revealed? There cannot be a moment's reasonable doubt. The whole expedient, so simple and unique, so improbable yet effective, carries with it the evidence of its own divine origin. *It was of God!* Such a method of healing, such a mode of rescue from death of the entire camp of Israel could never have been the conception of a *human* mind. It transcends the loftiest thought of Moses. We here combat an important error common to many pious people, that the atonement of Christ originated the love of God to man, rather than that the love of God originated the atonement of Christ. *The atonement was the effect of a cause, and that cause was the everlasting love of God to His Church.* It is a perfect satire upon Christianity to represent the death of Jesus as the *procuring* cause of God's love to man, as if that could be love in God which was not essential and spontaneous. Had not God first loved us, and had not that love embodied itself in the gift of His beloved Son, there had been no expedient by which He could, with honor to Himself, have justified the sinner and remain infinitely holy and just. Listen to that familiar passage, familiar as a household word, yet, we fear, falling like an icicle on the heart of many, "God **so** loved the world" - Oh, that monosyllable "so" - eternity will be occupied with its depth- "God **so** loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Here you see the *origin* of the atonement- namely, *the everlasting love of the Father.* Human philosophy, in its happiest discoveries, could never have devised an expedient which should unite the two extremes of being- God, the Holy One, and man, the sinner- brought into a state of friendship and love. To God, then, we ascribe the scheme of redemption, the uplifting of the crucified Savior, as the only means by which the sinner, dying from the sting of the serpent, could be saved.

Another point of coincidence was, THE APPARENT INADEQUACY OF THE MEANS TO THE END. To the eye of a passing observer, the lifting up of that cold, lifeless serpent would seem like a mockery. What relation could there possibly be, sense would have reasoned, to the case of the Israelites? So does the salvation of God appear in the eye of this world. "To the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness." The redemption of man was achieved by the unparalleled humiliation of the Son of God; and that brazen serpent- not of gold or of silver- was the expressive and appropriate symbol of the humble and lowly appearance of Jesus, by whose work man should be raised from the dunghill of his fall, to a throne in glory. The Son of God humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death. Let the atonement of the Son of God be our study- it will heighten and ennoble our views of the glory from where He stooped to save. *The Son of God humbled Himself to our nature, robed Himself with suffering humanity, endured our curse, bore our sin, and paid to justice the penalty of our transgressions.* And, as to the eye of the bitten Israelite, *that brazen serpent had no form or loveliness, and yet was the instrument of his life,* so did it set forth this great truth, that the highest life and deepest glory of the

Church springs from the humiliation of the Son of God; and from those depths of poverty and lowliness and sorrow to which He sank, our noblest life and richest hope springs.

Look, too, at THE SIMPLICITY OF THE REMEDY. It was but a *pole*, upon the summit of which stood the form of a serpent. There were many splendid and costly pieces of temple furniture, but God selected *the most simple and least ornamental and costly instrument* to effect the mighty cure. All this was purposely significant of the simplicity of the gospel. Another illustration of the simplicity of God's plan of saving suggests itself in the case of Naaman the leper. When commanded by the prophet to go and dip himself three times in Jordan, he was angry, and exclaimed, in the pride of his heart and in the consciousness of an imaginary insult, "Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? May I not wash in them, and be clean?" He stumbled at the simplicity of God's cure. But he lived to know that God's mode of dealing with man is designed to humble human pride, that no flesh should glory in His presence; and that to obey Him is better than earthly sacrifice, and is the secret of all blessing. Such is the simplicity of salvation! It is but to believe and be saved. A simple look, an empty palm outstretched, a trembling hand touching the border, one drop of atoning blood applied by the Spirit, and the moral virus is arrested, the wound is healed, the sinner lives, the soul is saved! No great thing, O man, is required of you. No self-torture, no, long pilgrimage, no wasting hunger, no costly self-sacrifice. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, wash in the blood of the slain Lamb, look to the uplifted cross, and a nobler life than you did forfeit in Eden will flow back to your soul, and bear you to an endless life of glory.

A third point of resemblance- THE REMEDY WAS PERFECT. Nothing was to be added to it. So complete, that anything of human device supplementing this God's means of life would but have neutralized its influence and rendered it of none effect. Solemn is the truth illustrated here! So perfect is the atonement of the Son of God, so complete the work of Christ, the law so fully honored, justice so completely satisfied, and the glory of God so fully vindicated, that that holy Lord God, who sees flaw and imperfection and spot in everything else, says to a poor, believing soul, stung by that old serpent the devil, yet robed in the righteousness of Jesus, "You are all fair, my love. I see no spot in you." Hold fast, beloved, to the perfection of God's remedy of saving sinners. Be jealous of everything that would dare seek to supplement it. What a lesson to God's ministers is this! When Moses lifted up the serpent on that pole, he lifted up nothing else with it. Away with baptisms, and sacraments, and apostolic succession, and strifes about orders and polity, forms and ceremonies- let them not be once named in the same breath that bids the dying sinner look to the Crucified and live! Talk to a poor sin-distressed soul about baptism, ritualism, and the sacrament, and churches, and religious duties, and you are a cruel mocker of his woe. Put all these things in the shadows, and tell him of Jesus only, of His love and grace to poor sinners, of His willingness and ability to save to the uttermost, of the blood that cleanses, and of the righteousness that clothes, and

of the Spirit that anoints, and that all this is the gift of free grace without a single work of human merit, and you have brought him glad tidings of great joy. Angels' chimes not half so sweet as the melody with which you fill that soul. "We preach Christ crucified," is the echo of every true minister of Christ. Beware, then, of mixing up anything with your salvation. I care not how sacred it may be, if you place it side by side with the Savior, if you exalt the Church and its ordinances above Christ and His cross, or even to a level with Him, you rob your soul of joy, peace, hope, and fatally mislead the souls of others. Look to Jesus only. Look away from your baptism, and your church, and your own doings, to Jesus only! I would risk the eternal happiness of my own soul upon the assertion that that look of faith will take you to heaven. "Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your soul."

Another point of resemblance is- the serpent was LIFTED ON A POLE. Some have interpreted it of the gospel. I adopt the interpretation. The gospel is a revelation of Jesus the Crucified. It uplifts Christ. It is full of Jesus, all about Jesus,

and nothing but Jesus. And whenever and by whomsoever the gospel is truly, simply, and lovingly preached, then Christ crucified is uplifted. The gospel is thus the divinely appointed instrument of making Jesus known, of uplifting Christ, of pointing the sinner to the Lamb of God. O glorious gospel of the blessed God! your form is divine, your voice is music, your breath redolent of heaven! You are fairer than all the systems of men, for words of free, pardoning grace flow from your lips!

But we reach a vital point. WHAT WAS THE ACTION? It was to LOOK. Nothing less, nothing more. It was simply to raise the languid eye, perchance dimming with death, and rest it on the object; and, distant and shadowy as was the glimpse, that glimpse instantly rolled back the cold chill of death, roused the sinking pulse, and brought back life to the dying patient. Oh, what a glorious truth is this! It is but in faith to *look away from our wound to Jesus*, and, looking, we are healed. We speak to you who are always poring over your wound. You argue that you are so vile; we believe it; but this we tell you, poring over the depth and blueness and aggravation of the wound will never bring you healing. You must look to Jesus. Bring your soul to His blood, and, so coming, what shall be the result? Oh, most blessed! "Whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but shall have everlasting life;" the result will be, you are *saved*. You have two situations before you- life and death, heaven and hell. Perish you must, if you do not look in faith alone to Christ for salvation. Perish you will, if you turn your back upon the Son of God, and apply to your wounds the remedies of human invention, and refuse the remedy a God of love has provided and revealed in the cross of His well-beloved Son. "Behold the Lamb of God." "Look unto me, all you ends of the earth, and be you saved." "Looking unto Jesus." Such is the unity of God's Word in its revelations of this great and precious truth- look and live, look and be saved. Approach the cross, raise those eyes which smite the ground, and rest

them, swimming with tears, and dim with unbelief though they are, upon Jesus the Crucified, and everlasting life shall be yours.

And WHERE DID THIS GREAT EVENT TRANSPIRE? In, the WILDERNESS. What is *this world* to us who feel the pangs of sin, but who yet have believed in Jesus? It is a wilderness! But oh, we have found grace in the wilderness of our own hearts and in the wilderness of this world, in finding a

Savior full of grace. The Lord, my reader, may be leading you into the emptiness, poverty, and dreariness of yourself, of the creature, and of the world; that, amid its nothingness, you may find Jesus. To this end God often deals thus with

the children of men. When He has removed the creature you loved, blighted the health you prided in, scattered the wealth you boasted of, and has brought you very low, in that desolate wilderness state you have found Jesus.

Overlook not the privilege which these Israelites had of a RENEWED APPLICATION TO THE BRAZEN SERPENT. If they were again stung, they were privileged again to look, and again they were healed. It is the privilege of the child of God to be *constantly looking to Christ*. In every fresh assault of temptation, in every fresh surprisal of sin, if, in penitence and faith, he repairs to Jesus he shall know what David's experience was- "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not lack; He restores my soul." *Look again*, O believer, if you are wounded by Satan or wounded by sin, wounded by the world or wounded by the saints, and you shall feel that the blood of Jesus has still power to give you peace, and the sympathy of Christ sufficient to give you comfort!

And HOW GRACIOUS WAS THE REMEDY! Did they *ask* for it? Did they *merit* it? Not a petition rose from their lips, not an act *deserving* such an interposition had they done! Such is our salvation!" By grace are you saved." "It is of faith, that it might be by grace." Embrace this precious truth, that your salvation is "without money and without price," that "whoever will may come and take of the water of life freely," and you shall be saved. The brazen serpent could convey but *one* benefit, but *we have in the Lord Jesus all fulness of blessing*. Not only have we the salvation of the soul, but comfort and solace, guidance and wisdom, does Jesus vouchsafe for all who live by faith upon Him, the Son of God. You have not a difficulty, nor a sorrow, nor a need which you may not take to Christ. Live upon Jesus, "in whom it has pleased the Father all fulness shall dwell."

Once more- the Israelite, thus healed, at last died; but THE BELIEVING SINNER, ONCE HEALED AND SAVED, NEVER DIES! Jesus says, "Whoever lives and believes in me shall never die." Saved, his soul shall wing its way to eternal glory the moment it has shaken off this mortal coil, the instant it has disengaged itself from the frail tabernacle of sin, suffering, and death, and shall mount with pinions swifter than eagles, to be at rest forever. This would I say for the comfort of some who may bend over this page- Do you feel your days are numbered? The inroad

of disease, the approach of mortality, the shadows of eternity gathering around you? Lo! I bring you a message from God. Look to Jesus Christ, and when you depart hence, you shall sleep in Him, and you shall not die the death that is eternal. It may be late- the eleventh hour of life- yet not too late. Your view of Jesus may be dim, still, if you look in simple faith, that look will save your soul. Saints of God! live for the glory of Him who bought you with His precious blood! Looking unto Jesus, run the race set before you, and pause not until you exchange the telescope of faith for the beatific vision of Jesus in glory.

"Look unto Me, and be saved  
From all your depths of sin,  
From every crimson stain without,  
And strongest power within.

"Look unto Me, and be saved  
From all your earthly care;  
Alike I grasp eternity,  
And number every hair.

"Look unto Me, for I am God  
To Me belongs all power,  
At once to give eternal life,  
And guide each passing hour.

"Look unto Me, and be saved  
From every doubt and fear;  
Your warfare is accomplished,  
Your path to glory clear.

"Look unto Me- 'tis no great deed,  
A humble look to cast;  
This is enough- the power that saves  
Is Mine, from first to last.

"Look unto Me while life endures,  
I give each fleeting breath;  
Look unto Me when death is near,  
I hold the keys of death.

"Look unto Me, for I am God;  
Whatever to Me is given,  
Whatever committed to My care  
Is safe for earth or heaven."

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