

The serpent of brass. (Quality: very good)

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Preacher: Wood, Clement (1920-2010)

[0 : 0 0] Upon thee, Lord, for all needed help, I venture to draw your prayerful attention to Numbers chapter 21 verses 9, 10, and 11. Numbers chapter 21 verses 9, 10, 11. 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 left. And the children of Israel set forward and hitched in Oboth. And they journeyed from Oboth and pitched at Ije Aberim in the wilderness, which is before Moab toward the sun rising. Israel murmured, spake against God, despite all the blessings that God had bestowed upon them in the wilderness journey. Deliverance from bondage under the blood, a way made through the red sea, manna from heaven, water from the spitten rock, a pillar of cloud by day and a fire by night to guide them in the way, their raiment waxing not old, deliverance from their enemies. And yet, Israel murmuring. And are we guiltless? Oh, to be preserved from speaking against God, from hard thoughts of God. Let your conversation be without covetousness.

Be content with such things as ye have. For he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. Indeed, the journey was rough. Indeed, the soul of the people was discouraged. Indeed, at times we are cast down. Indeed, we find the going hard. But the promise stands. Thy shoe shall be iron and brass. And as thy days, so shall thy strength be. And cast thy burden on the Lord, and he shall sustain thee. Not always a promise to remove the burden, but sustaining grace to bear thee up to bear the burden. Because of sin, that barrier of protection was broken down. And God has sent fiery serpents into their midst. I doubt not that up to this time that there had been full preservation from the venom of these creatures. But now, God manifests his anger, and chastens his people, and sends into their midst these fiery serpents. And they bit the people.

Now, when we meditate on this portion of the word of God, we may overlook a very solemn detail detail that is given. And that is that much people of Israel died. We can tend to think, and I hope we shall be led into it in a moment, of the wonderful provision that God made, whereby the bitten Israelite facing death lived.

But never let it be forgotten that much people of Israel died. It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed.

New every morning are thy compassions. Great is thy faithfulness. The psalmist said that he hath not dealt with us after our sin, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.

[6 : 3 0] Is it not an increased wonder with thee that thou, my hearer, art out of a deserved hell? All that we might be blessed with the assurance of an interest, as I believe many of us are, in that precious word, for God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation, through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us.

Now as these people were bitten, what was the effect? What is the teaching? Surely we see venom, we see poison, we see pain, we see distress, hopelessness, helplessness, faintness, sickness, thirst.

And the fear of death, and none to help. And see written over it all, sin.

See the justice of almighty God. Israel then acknowledged, we have sinned, for we, what a solemn word this is, have spoken against the Lord and against thee.

What care we need in what we say. And all is known to our God.

- [8 : 30] Just an aside here. Earlier, you remember that Miriam, the sister of Moses, Aaron, his brother, particularly Miriam, had spoken against Moses.
- And God dealt with Miriam very solemnly. She became a leper. Was thou not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?
- Remember. And I felt led in prayer. I hope I may say that humbly. To pray that our lives may be governed by the love of Christ.
- Kept in the fear of the Lord. Those words I often name. Inasmuch as ye've done it. And what have we done?
- What have we said? How have we acted? Unto one of the least of these, my brethren. You've done it. Unto me. And that not only in deeds of kindness.
- [9 : 44] But surely that stands true. If we are hurtful and harmful and unkind. Unto one to another.
- Even as the Lord said to Saul at his conversion. Why persecute? My church. My people. Now. Why persecute his staff?
- Me. I name it. I feel to need it. Need these warnings. There's nothing so easy for us to sit back. And I was going to use the word and may I.
- With reverence. Smug satisfaction. And look at Israel with all their murmuring. And all their complaining. And think we're guiltless. But my friend. Are we guiltless?
- No. When our opening hymn speaks of our fickleness of our ways. And yet. The faithfulness of our God. Now what did Moses do?
- [10 : 42] They said. Pray to the Lord that he will take away the serpents from us. What a lovely spirit we see in Moses. Is that to be seen in us?
- You may say. Well. This is rather strange preaching. My friend. I will say this. Not to take back any word that I've said. Providing it's right.
- And ugly it is. But you know. As Bunyan says. The practical part of religion. Is walking these things out. It is. By their fruits.
- Ye shall know them. And here we. Now what have we done? You know. What I would do. If I was left to myself.
- I would say. Now you brought this on yourself. You deserve this punishment. And. And. It would manifest. A very bitter spirit. But that's not the spirit of Christ.
- [11 : 42] Here we have an example set. Moses. Praying for the people. That's the way. To deal with your enemies. That's the way to deal with those.
- That deal unkindly with you. And not to pray for. John. The beloved disciple. And say. Master. Will you. Bring down. Fire from heaven.
- No. Ye know not what spirit ye are of. Rather that you might pray. My friend. For. That. The Lord might have mercy upon them.
- And that the Lord made a provision. And what do we see then. In this serpent bitten. Israelite. Oh. We see. That all sinners. Are bitten.
- They're venom. And you know. I would understand. That the smallest intrusion. Of venom. By the serpent.
- [12 : 40] That would. Be fatal. And my friend. One. Unpardoned sin. Would bring us to hell. And. An eternity. In hell. Would never make an atonement. For that sin. Never. Never. Is there nothing.
- Whereby. We can rid ourselves. Of this venom. No. Not. Of creature. We cannot turn. To others. And. I think. One of our hymns.

Says. Bain is bandaged. Plaster. And so forth. Indeed. These. These. Could not look. To Moses. Nor to. Any. Iser. Who now is the.

High priest. As Aaron had died. Not to. Even. To offer. Sacrifices. On the altar. Not even. To the tabernacle. Not even. Because.

[13 : 34] They were an Israelite. That did not. Preserve them. From. The threatened death. But God. Speaks.

God. Makes a way. And God. Speaks to Moses. Make thee. A fiery serpent. And set it. Upon a pole. Now.

The Lord Jesus Christ. Speaks of himself. Now. As Moses. Lifted up. The serpent. In the wilderness. Even so. Must the son of man.

Be lifted up. Oh. Just think. For a moment. Of the amazing. Love of Jesus Christ. The eternal. Son of God. Oh.

As we thought. Recently. At the season. Of the year. Of his. Wondrous. Condescension. In coming. To this earth. This spot. So sinful. This world.

[14 : 28] So evil. Hell. When we think. Even. Of ourselves. With. When we've been gathered. With God's people. And then. Perhaps on a weeknight.

Have to go back. Into the world. Or. What. A change of atmosphere. There is. But think of the holy one. The harmless one. The son of God.

Coming to this earth. And. The man of sorrows. Rejected of men. Crew. And set it north. Despised. And yet. Here. Is.

The one. To be set up high. To lay down his life. On Calvary's cross. And I. If I be lifted up. Will. From the earth.

Will draw all men. Unto me. Let's trace it out. Step by step. As we may be held. This was a serpent of brass. As it has been said. In one of the hymns.

[15 : 22] Is it like. The serpents. That bit. But the distinction. Was this. There was no venom. He. Jesus Christ. The sinless one.

And yet. Made. In the likeness. Of man. And who humbled himself. Became obedient unto death. Even the death of the cross.

He was made. To be sin for us. Who knew no sin. And the significance of brass. We do not wish to over spiritualize.

The word of God. It does not speak of gold. But brass or copper. As it might be understood. We think of the brazen altar. We think of the place of sacrifice.

Of the shedding of blood. Of death. Of fire. Of consuming. We see of the cross. The saviour. In that. The drinking of the cup.

[16 : 18] Of the wrath of heaven. And we might say. At the fire of that wrath. My God. My God. Why hast thou. Earth a saver made. Made to be sin.

Set high. And mark again. It was but one. And neither is there salvation. In any other. There is none other name. Under heaven. Given among men.

Whereby we must be saved. My younger friend. As well as my older. What is this name to you? What is Jesus Christ to you?

Who the lamenting prophet said. I know concerning Zion. But also prophetically. I believe. Concerning Calvary. Calvary. Is it nothing to you?

Or ye. Who. Pass by. I say. There is one. And. I know this. Where there is spiritual life.

[17 : 17] Where the eyes are open. Where there is a conviction of sin. Where there is faith. It will all be centred. In the coming. In faith. And looking alone to.

Jesus Christ. Nothing. In my hand I bring. But simply. To thy cross. That I cling. It was to be set up on high.

Blessed be God. That these things were not done in a corner. And though. Man is blind. Though he came unto his own. And his own received him not.

And the world was made by him. And the world knew him not. And yet. He was lifted high. And there my friend. All poor sinners.

Yes. Yes. The vilest. And I love to think of this. In the camp. Though. That Israelite. Might be at the extreme border.

[18 : 15] Of the camp. Might be as near death. As death could be. During the last breath. The worst of all. The vilest of the vile.

The poorest of the poor. And yet. As our text says. When. If any man. Had. If a servant had been. Any man. I like that word.

Any man. It brings us to the whosoever of the gospel. Any man. When he beheld. The serpent of brass. He left. Because. Yes.

Those eyes. Nearly closed in death. Seeing his lost state. Looking on the provision. That God had made. Turning to this. One way.

This. Is life for death. One sins. Upon a life. I did not live. Upon a death. I did not die.

[19 : 11] Another's life. Another's death. I state my whole. Eternity. My brethren. The dear Lord Jesus.

Was lifted high. And. One also. And again. Does not wish to be taken up. With vain imagination. But. Surely.

The sun. Shining. On. This. Serpent of brass. A light. Would shine forth. It was visible. Oh. But. Think of the state of sinners.

On this earth. Think of them. Passing that cross. By. Many know about it. I know many. I am utter. Ignorance. Even of the cross. Even of the saviour. But think of those.

That pass it by. Scorn it. And set it at naught. Trample on the blood. And count it as nothing. They may even speak of Christ. Rightly so. In the example.

[20 : 10] That he's sacked. In the teaching. That he's taught. But they know not. The plague of their own heart. They feel not. The venom within. They know not. Themselves. As poor guilty sinners.

They have never been. Humbled at the foot of the cross. They never had their eyes. Open. To see themselves. And look to the saviour. But how is it with you? The wages of sin.

Is death. We merit it. But the gift of God. Is eternal life. Whosoever believeth in him. Blessed were.

The vilest sinner. Out of hell. Who lives to feel his need. Is welcome at the throne of grace. The saviour's. Blood to plead. Whosoever believeth.

And what is it to believe. It's God given faith. It's that work of grace in a sinner's heart. The new birth. And as I think the abundance speaks of it.

[21 : 07] That coming to Jesus. That believing in him. Yea. It is all one. And so it is. Looking. You see. The eyes open.

This one thing I know. That whereas I was blind. Then now I see. I see I'm lost. I see I'm a sinner. I see that not the labour of my hands.

Can fulfil thy law's demands. Could my tears forever flow. Could my zeal. No respite. No. All for sin could not atone. Thou must save.

And thou alone. But oh. And you know. I like those lines. We need grace to do it. Turn your eyes upon Jesus.

Look full in his wonderful face. And the things of earth. Will grow strangely dim. In the light of the glory and grace. Born again sinners.

[22 : 02] Believers in Jesus. Will have much to do at the cross. I think you'll know what I mean. There'll be a coming. Constant coming. To the Lord Jesus.

A pleading. Of that sin atoning. Precious. Invaluable. Blood. Of Jesus Christ. Life.

For death. Light. For darkness. Heaven. Instead of hell. If he beheld. The serpent of brass.

He left. We pass on with the text. And the children of Israel. Set forward.

I think. That many of them. Must have done. This in a very. Humbled frame. They'd been near death.

[23 : 05] They had witnessed. The death of many. Of their own. People. But now.

Living. And going forward. We pass. From one year. To. Another. We set. Forward.

I say. As I think. I said earlier. Amazed. That we're out. Of a deserved. Hell.

Why me. Oh God. Why. Such a wretch. As I must. Must ever. Night in hell. Were not. Salvation. Free.

Oh. Why did Jesus. Show to me. The beauties. Of his face. Why. To my soul. Did he convey. The wonders. Of his grace. And yet another. Says. On such love.

[24 : 01] My soul. Still ponder. Love. So great. So rich. So free. Say. Whilst lost. In holy wonder. Why. Oh God. Such.

Love. To me. But we set. Forward. Every. Breath. We draw. Every step.

We take. Every tick. Of the clock. You know. It's strange. Isn't it. How. Our memories. Are stirred. But I remember. My old pastor. In my old chapel.

And the chapel. Clock. Had a fairly loud tick. And just once or twice. I remember. In his party. He said. Now stop. Listen. And there was a dead silence. And all you could hear.

Was the tick. Of the clock. Very telling. He was never dramatic. Very reverent. In his ministry. But. You know. As a young person. That impressed me.

[24 : 56] I believe. More than impressed me. And it's good. That we should think. Of these things. And what were your thoughts. Friend. When you hear. Of the train. Crash at Clapham.

And you hear. Of the air crash. At. In Scotland. And what were. Our thoughts. When we think. Yes. My dear. When I flew. Exactly. In that line.

Not on the same airline. I don't mean that. But in the same course. It might have been us. Would we have been ready? We don't know.

When that last step. Will be taken. Do we? It may be without warning. Visiting one of our dear friends. In fact. It was the. Secretary of the Gospel Standard.

One of the members of my church. Some years ago. And he had trouble. With one of the steps. Leading up to his front door. And he just called out to me. As I was leaving. He said. Pastor. Look out. Mind the last step.

[25 : 53] And. We had a few nice words. About that. The last. Step. How will you take it? Everything's got to be left behind.

Everything. Are you going forward? Will you take that last step? Without the blood. Without Jesus Christ. Still in your sin.

Oh friend. Is there oil in the vessel with the lamp? Will you be ready? When the call comes. Behold the bridegroom cometh. Go ye out to meet him. Then oh my God.

Prepare my soul for that great day. Oh wash me in thy precious blood. And take my sins away. They set forward. Now.

How do you set forward? How do I set forward? Do we map out our course? Do we order our steps? Do we plan our life?

[26 : 54] There is a right planning. In the fear of God. In prayer. Of course. But. I say. I'll be guided by one above. Do we pray. Lord.

Teach me thy way. Show me. Show me thy way. Teach me thy path. I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way that thou shalt go. I will guide thee with mine eye.

And. Israel. Had. A pillar of cloud by day. And pillar of fire by night. As we read. You may say. But I can't see anything like that. No. Of course you can't. But what have we?

We've got the will of God. And pray over it. And pray for divine guidance. Pray for light to shine on your path. Pray for grace. As I said this afternoon.

To wait. Wait upon the Lord. God. They set. Forward. It's setting forward. In faith. It is setting forward.

[27 : 50] Ye not pass this way. Here too far. It's setting forth. In obedience. And obedience to God. May be at times. A path of trial. The testing.

But it'd be the right way. There'd be a blessing in it. I must not. Deviate too much. But. Just think of the. Disciples. When Jesus told them.

To get in the boat. And go to the other side. No. They obeyed him. Jesus went with them. On one occasion. And then was in the mount. On the other. They were obedient. But look what it led them to.

Yes. But not just the storm. Not just the height. Of those waves. Not the darkness. Of the hour. Not the fourth watch. Of the night only. Not when they were. As it were. The wind was contrary.

But look at the blessing. Look as they saw. Their Lord say. Peace be still. Look as he came. Walking on the waters. On the other occasion. You see friend. The right way.

[28 : 44] It may be a tried way. But it'd be a path of blessing. And you know. It's a wonderful mercy. To be able to look up to the Lord. And say. Lord. That thou didst lead me. I stand in the place.

Where thou didst direct me. Again. Just a little diversion. When Israel. In that dreadful. As we might say. Situation. With. The chariots of Egypt.

Coming up behind them. And the wilderness on either side. And the Red Sea in front of them. You know. They were full of fear. But you know. If they'd looked up. They would have seen the pillar of cloud above them.

And that showed that they stood. Where God had led them. And though they were in great difficulties. Faith. All that faith may be given to us. To trust God. To bring us through.

And he will. That dear minister. I referred to this afternoon. I think of another remark. He made in that sermon. Men can stack bricks.

[29 : 41] And men can stack hay. But God can stack water. Now they set forth. And pitched. And. This signifies a tent.

Now there's teaching here. First. That here have we no abiding city. We seek one to come. We're thankful for our homes. We're thankful for the comforts of life.

I sometimes wonder whether we're too comfortable. I believe. In the days when. There was poverty. And need. There was spiritual life in us.

We pray. Lord sanctify prosperity. And help me to use. What thou dost give me. For the glory of thy name.

And for the good of others. But. I say. This world is not our home. There's mansions in glory. There's a home in heaven.

[30 : 38] And so. The pilgrim. Pitches his tent. Doesn't one say. A day's march. Nearer home. And then there's this thought too.

That we're to be separate from the world. And this thought also. That our bodies. Are likened to a tabernacle. An earthly tabernacle. We that are in this tabernacle.

Do groan. Being burdened. And now. A tent in eastern lands. Could be taken down in moments. There'd be no sign. That it'd ever been there. And my friend.

It may be a sudden moment. That we should be taken. Oh. For the child of God. Sudden. Taking is to. Sudden glory.

Oh. What a blessed prospect. But. In this tabernacle. Now. And yet. We're fearfully. And wonderfully made. And yet.

[31 : 39] Nothing can stay. That appointed moment of death. I've often thought. That one might be enabled. If conscious. To be able to say.

At that time. In peace. Let me resign my breath. And I salvation see. My sins deserve eternal death. But Jesus.

Died for me. Oh. But. We want to go carefully. But I understand. One meaning of this word. And that is teaching. In meaning of the words of God.

I noticed last night. I was speaking. As I said this afternoon. Of the word fountains. And I didn't realize. That the. For example. Hebrew names. In the Old Testament.

Beginning with. En. Signify a fountain. And Hathor. And Eglain. And Endor. And so forth. Much instruction. Isn't that? At the same time.

[32 : 35] We never want to overreach. Never want to wrongly spiritualize. The word of God. We just venture. As far. As we feel. The Lord may lead us. But Oboth.

Means a water bottle. That is. That. There was. A refreshing. Not. Perhaps. A great quantity. But sufficient. And I like to think of this.

And I think of the. Wartime experience. In the air force. In the equipment. I remember. On the belt. That we used to wear. That there was a bottle. That could be filled with water. That at least.

Would give. A satisfying drink. For a few hours. And that is how I view this work. As we journey on. How often we say. Oh yes.

I was blessed at that. But oh my. Leaky memory. Oh I just can't remember. But you were fed. You're first. It was. Yes. Satisfied. There was a sip. By the way.

[33 : 29] There was a little help. As you journeyed on. And they're not to be despised. There are seasons of outstanding blessing. There are times when the cup may run over.

There's times when your soul may be feasted. At the gospel table. There are times. Yes. When there's a handful of purpose. But times when there's six measures of darling. You see.

Then oh how thankful we are. And never despise. Though little helps by the way. They are strengthening. They are supporting. They are reviving.

They are refreshing. They are encouraging. And this is their mercy. That God's dear children. Though they do thirst. They shall never thirst despairingly.

And a drop of living water. Is a promise of more to come. And they journeyed from Obath.

[34 : 27] And pictured I.J. A bearing. And the significance here. Is a heap of stones. Now. There's much could be said on this.

But we have to try and. Shorten their remarks a little. Heaps of stones. We think of monuments. We have monuments in air land.

You young people. Children would know. You see monuments. War memorials. And so forth. And. In eastern lands. There were the landmarks.

There were. Heaps of stones. Set up. Sometimes. And I would speak of this first. Very solemn reminders. Of the judgment of God.

Against sin. You remember Achan. And he was stoned. And they left.

[35 : 21] That. Body. Under the heap of stones. You may. Think of Absalom too. As another. You may go.

In your mind. Down to devices. In Wiltshire. And look at that monument. Where it is erected. Where a woman said. That she paid a certain. Sum of money. And if she had. Was telling a lie.

God strike her dead. And she was telling a lie. And there she fell down. Dead. And the money. Was found in her. Clenched hand. Have you some heaps of stones?

I have. Oh when I was. A lad. About 16 years of old. I was in the hospital. At Tunbridge Wells. And there was a service. In the ward. Church of England.

And though I was but a lad. I remember very vividly. How that he spake. Of all flesh is as grass. The word of God. And when that little service was over. A man in the bed to me.

[36 : 20] About 50. Strong looking man. Making excellent progress. From his operation. Ridiculed the ward. Scorned it. Laughed over it.

We went to sleep. That night. The next morning. I woke. And. As I looked to my left there. The bed was empty. The nurse came along.

In due course. I said nurse. Where's Sansa? He died in the night. There's a. Not literal.

But. I never go into that ward. But I think of. That's solemnly that. A heap of stones.

But also. And I must keep an eye on that time. Surely. There are some sweet heaps of stones. May I just drop another word here.

[37 : 19] I had not thought of saying it. But in my simple way. You know I was in the air force. And in Canada for a year. And. I won't go into all the details. But.

I had a sick leave. And. I was privileged to go to a place called Banff. In the Rockies. I went there by night. It was pitch dark. I didn't see a thing. Didn't see the approach from the prairies.

To the Rockies at all. But. The next morning. As I drew the curtains. And saw these mountains. Snow capped blue sky. Oh friend. What a humbling sight I had.

I felt the glory. And the majesty of God. And then. His care for me. Such a sinner. It was a sacred moment.

Well. I never thought I should see that. Place again. Without. And I haven't tried to go into details. An added service was arranged.

[38 : 15] And. All the little details. And. The most wonderful thing. I stood. Not just in that room. I wouldn't remember where it was. But in that place. The memories.

The. As it were. The heap of stones. You've got an Ebenezer. Can you look back for it. And say. Yes. There the Lord helped me. Have you got a Bethel.

With help. That was a Bethel to me. I felt the solemnity of it. The blessedness of it. And the goodness of my God. The. Heap of stones.

And it's a good thing. You know. To have a mister. Isn't it? The Lord. Watch between me and thee. While we're absent. One from the other. But. I must come to the end.

In the wilderness. Which is before Noah. Yes. This world. I believe. The more we taste. Of the riches of Christ. The less we shall seek. Of the world. And it be a wilderness to us.

[39 : 14] What a mercy it is. What a mercy to be. A taste to be changed. And. To seek. And to taste.

That the Lord is gracious. Before Moab. We might just think of Moab. It was. Was it not there. That. When.

Balaam came. And you know. Spoke. Those words. And yet. God wouldn't permit him. To curse Israel. As. Balak designed. But you know.

Moab gained the victory. When. The Israelites. Committed cordon. With the daughters of Moab. Watch. You're on the borders. You're in a world. Of wickedness. And of evil.

We need to be capped. We need to be preserved. And yet. Who can tell. Out of yon. Moab. There may be a roof. And there is a roof. You heard of one. Or two.

[40 : 09] Even when we were in the states. Wonderful cases. For those in sin. And darkness. And brought out. By a wonderful work. Of God. So my friend.

Yes. There before Moab. And lastly. Is to ward the sun rising. Oh. This just literally means. Toward the east. Of course it does. But what to the child of God.

It says. That the word of God. Thy son. Shall no more go down. Neither shall thy moon. Withdraw itself. For the Lord shall be. Thine everlasting light. And the days of thy morning.

Shall be. Ended. Now you say. It's so dark with me. Did Jesus once. Upon me shine. Then Jesus is forever mine. I thank God.

For these lines. So blessed. In my soul. In a time. Of affliction. And chastening. And my heart. Was so hard. That was in the air force. And yet.

[41 : 07] The Lord. Broke my heart. In this way. And came again. Son. H-U-N. Son of my soul. Thou saviour dear. It is not night. If thou art near.

Oh friend. The blessed prospect. Toward the sun rising. Oh. That we may then. Go forward.

In faith. Leaning on our beloved. Looking alone. To our dear saviour. Jesus Christ. Yes. Though it's a rough path.

He led them forth. By the right way. That they might go. To a city. Of habitation. And oh. The web of. Time.

He wove. And in the tears of sorrow. And lusted with his love. Oh bless. The hand that guided. Oh bless. The heart that planned. When thrown.

[42 : 04] In highest glory. In Emmanuel's land. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Bye.