

“Leaving Downcast Behind”

03-15-15

Lent is a somber time. We bury the “Alleluia” in worship for the entire season. The word doesn’t appear in our songs or our responses. This is to remember the suffering and death of Jesus for us. But let’s face the truth. Christ is no longer dead! He’s risen! Our Savior is alive! Alleluia! We’re journeying toward eternity with Him!

Romans 2:4 says, “*God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance*”. We sin each day and we need to repent. But we must be sincere, for God searches our hearts. God tells us, “*You shall be holy. Wholly holy*”, as we talked about a couple of weeks ago. That said, Lenten repentance is done with confidence that **God forgives those who look up to Him.**

Open to Numbers 21. As Jesus was talking with Nicodemus in the dark of night, He told him that He too would be lifted up just like Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness.

The Old Testament people who had just been delivered from slavery in Egypt were not happy and they complained a lot! Instead of being grateful, they were angry with God! Let’s look back at verses 6-9, “*Then the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. And the people came to Moses and said, “We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you. Pray to the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us.” So Moses prayed for the people. And the LORD said to Moses, “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.*”

Can you imagine? The people looked down and saw snakes swarming all over the camp. Poisonous snakes. No Easter confidence; only downcast faces!

How many times are you and I downcast because of sin? How many times do we take our eyes off Jesus and look down at ourselves and the things around us? Actually, **every time we’re downcast is due to sin.** Let’s say you have some problem that’s getting you down, sometimes to the point of despair. It may be that you didn’t cause that problem, but it causes you to focus on it not God. Let’s think about what the Bible teaches us about sin.

When Adam and Eve sinned, sin came into the whole world. One bad apple spoiled the whole bushel, or as the Bible says, “*One trespass led to condemnation for all men*”. So what does this mean? Because of sin, **humanity is fallen; creation is defiled**, and it’s a **broken, sinful world**. You may not have directly caused whatever

is making you downcast, but our sinful humanity has brought it all upon all of us! Each of us was born in sin!

But Jesus reminds us that when Moses raised up the Bronze Serpent, everyone who was downcast and in danger, who looked up to the pole, was saved from death! Jesus says that action pointed ahead to Himself. He would be raised up on the cross, but as we look up to Him as it says in John 3:16, *“whosoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life”*.

We can only imagine how the Israelites looked up to the Bronze Serpent. With just as much earnestness, with just as much desperation for eternal life, we need to lift up our eyes to Jesus on the cross! Listen to these words from John 12:31-33, *“Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die.*”

Open to Ephesians 2. Paul gives us a true message of hope in a world that seems to be turned against God, just like we are when we sin! Look at verses 4-9, *“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”*

We want to do it on our own! Your own works? Ultimately they’ll make you downcast. **Snakes on the ground? Sin!** Don’t let the snakes bite you! Don’t let sin control your life! **Jesus on the cross? Grace.** His death and resurrection are gifts of grace to us! We didn’t deserve it! We need to look up with the hope of life!

Your life this week will be between the two, between being downcast and looking up in hope. That’s just the way it is. We hear Jesus giving great uplifting things on Sunday, but things get us down during the week. This Lent we’re focusing on God’s calling us to our true home in heaven. What an uplifting thing to hear about our coming life for eternity. That should change our focus!

The true message from today’s sermon, and worship, is for us to leave downcast behind. **Look up in hope to Jesus.**

The late Dr. August Mennicke told this story about his grandson. *“Our 3-year-old grandson was standing at the basement stairs, trying to muster enough courage to*

make the descent. Before taking the first step, he said, "Oh Jesus, it's awful dark down there. You'd better hold my hand."

Listen to these words from Psalm 42:11, "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God."

When something this week has you downcast, look up! Ask Jesus to hold your hand. Leave downcast behind and look up in hope to Jesus, your Savior!