



JOHN 3:14-21

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.

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.

(verses 14-16)

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The children of Israel had a pretty rocky time of it as they travelled through the wilderness, heading to the Promised Land. They'd been powerfully rescued from slavery in Egypt – you'd think they'd never forget! They'd escaped the angel of death as the blood of the lamb kept them safe as the angel *passed-over*. They'd been led through the parted waters of the Red Sea, coming safely through on dry ground. They'd watched as those same waters came crashing down on their enemies in hot pursuit. The Lord rescued them! You'd think they'd be grateful.

But not for long. They returned to grumbling. They still complained. They still had rebellion in their hearts. And they experienced the consequence. At one point, as they vehemently spoke out against God and Moses, the Lord sent venomous snakes to afflict them. Judgement fell. Many were bitten. Many started to die.

Isn't this an apt picture of the human condition? Mankind is in rebellion against the Lord God Almighty, and suffers dire consequences as a result.

Yet, even still, God so loved. He so loved the world, every single one of us, each in our own degree of rebellion, that he put a rescue plan into action. In the desert, that plan involved a bronze snake, lifted high on a pole so that the people could choose, if they would, to turn their eyes upon it and be saved. What grace.

But when it came to the rebellion of the whole world, the plan was more weighty – much more costly. Our God chose to send his Son. Just as that snake was lifted up, so would the Son of God himself be lifted high on a cross, dying to provide salvation for all who were afflicted – for all of us.

To those snake-bitten, there is but one remedy. To lift our eyes to the Son of God; to see him dying there on the cross; to believe his sacrifice is effective for salvation; to entrust ourselves into his hands so that instead of perishing we might receive eternal life. The cure was powerful and effective in the desert – snake venom was overcome. Even more so, the cure is powerful and effective from the cross – the stinging, venomous curse of sin is counteracted, its poison drained.

“Lifted up” – that’s what it cost Jesus. But all the way through these verses there is a wonderful play on words that hinges on this phrase. Literally, Moses *lifted up* the snake on the pole. Literally, Jesus was *lifted up* on the gibbet of the cross.

But the same Greek word translated as *“lifted up”* also has an additional meaning, a meaning John fully intends for us to grasp and ponder. This word also means to be *lifted up* in the sense of *“exalted.”* Clearly, both senses are true for Jesus. Physically, he was *“lifted up”* to save us. Wonderfully, at the same time, through that sacrifice, he is forever *“exalted”* – yes, lifted up as Lord.

So, we look to the cross. We lift our sights to him. We find ourselves saved and healed and forgiven. And we declare that he is forever worthy. Be exalted, dear Lord.

Yes, Lord Jesus – be exalted. You were lifted up for my salvation. Therefore, I exalt you now and evermore.

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Reflect:

Pause several times today to picture Jesus *lifted up* on the cross. Give him thanks for rescuing you from the poisoned venom of sin. Then *lift him* up in praise. *Exalt* him. He is worthy.