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THE SERPENT OF BRASS.

Numbers xxi. 4—10.

THE Israelites were a nation to whom God promised to give the land of Canaan as a possession, a rich fruitful land, filled with olive-yards and vineyards, and flowing with milk and honey. On their way to this land they had to pass through a dry and thirsty desert; and, notwithstanding God had given them a plenteous supply of water following them, and also food sufficient for their support, yet they murmured against him, and despised even the blessings he had given them on their way. On this account the Lord sent fiery serpents among them, and they bit the people, and much people of Israel died. Therefore they came to Moses, who was the leader appointed over them by the Lord, and confessed their sin in thus murmuring against the Lord, and intreated him to pray the Lord that those fiery serpents might be taken away from them. Moses accordingly prayed for the people; and the Lord said to him, "Make a serpent of brass, like one of those fiery serpents which have bitten the people, and set it upon a pole, where all may be able to see it; and it shall come to pass that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon this serpent of brass, shall live. And Moses made a serpent of brass, as he was told, and set 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 was cured of the bite, and lived."

Now, whoever you may be who are now reading this little tract, you are just like one of those Israelites who had been bitten by a fiery serpent; you have sin within you; you are still under the effects of its bite; whether old or young, rich or poor, respectable or despised, you are a *sinner*, and you have the effects of the bite of sin and Satan in you: and that is death. The poison is working in your heart, which, as the word of God says, is "desperately wicked." Nor is there any hope, any possibility, of your curing yourself. You cannot, by any means in your power, get rid of death, which is **working** in you, and which is just the consequence of the **sin** that is in you. All the medicine in the world cannot keep off death: nor if you had all the riches of earth, could you bribe death to

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keep away. Even whilst you are reading this, you are one minute nearer death. And what is the reason that it is appointed unto you, and unto men once to die? but because you and all men have sinned. This, then, is your state; the black poison of sin is working in you—silently, it may be, and secretly, but steadily and surely; and the end thereof is death.

Now, as the serpent of brass was raised on a pole, in order that the poor bitten Israelite might look at it and live, so Jesus Christ has been raised up on the cross, in order that any poor, perishing, dying sinner might believe on him, and have everlasting life. He had but to look—you have but to believe. You may, perhaps, be inclined to say, “How can simply believing on Jesus save me from my sins? How is that possible? I do not understand it.” And so the dying Israelite might have said to Moses, “How can my just looking at the serpent of brass cure me of this painful venomous bite? I cannot comprehend how that is possible.” But what would Moses’ answer to such a one have been? “Only look—only try; only believe my word, which indeed is not mine, but God’s: only cast one feeble dying look, and you will live. Surely, if you feel the agony of the poison working in your veins—surely if you know the fearful pain of dying from the fiery bite, you will not stay to reason about it, but will be glad to look; you will believe what I tell you to be true, even because you wish it to be true, because you wish to be healed.” So might Moses have answered, and so would I answer you, Only try; only believe that Jesus is (what his name means) a Saviour, proclaimed to sinners as a Saviour crucified for sin. You are perishing; is it not worth your while to try? Is it not a simple and an easy thing asked you of God, to believe and be saved? It is not my word, but God’s. It is not my message of salvation; but God thus proclaims it. He knows that you cannot save yourself; he knows that all your prayers, all your tears, cannot wash away one single sin; and he knows that unless they are every one cleansed away, every one remitted, every one gone, you cannot escape the just wages of sin—eternal death. God has therefore, in his wondrous love, made the salvation of a sinner all to depend upon what Jesus has done, and not on what the poor sinner can do, or rather *cannot* do. Look to Jesus; believe that God hath made him to be sin who knew no sin; believe that the only object of his



being made in the likeness of sinful flesh, was for the sake of sinners like yourself ; that the only reason of his being lifted up on the cross was to bear sin and the grievous punishment of it, instead of sinners having to bear it themselves. Cast but one trembling look of faith at him, and you are saved. The Israelite, if he believed what Moses told him, looked at the serpent of brass, however distant : dim though his eye might be through the close approach of death, able perhaps to draw but one last gasp of breath, yet one little dying glimpse of the serpent was enough ; he sprung up at once, as it were, a new man ; the fiery serpent's poison directly lost its power ; and the man, one moment a poor, dying, perishing wretch, was the next restored to the full vigour of health and strength, able to march on with the camp, and fight the battles of his Lord. And so one little look of faith at Jesus on your part—simple, childlike confidence in him and in his work for your soul, only believing that which God has said is true, and you are eternally redeemed, everlastingly saved ; no perishing after that for the poor sinner ; no condemnation for him then : but life, joy, peace, glory, become his portion.

You may, perhaps, ask, "How do I know that I have a right to look to Jesus thus ? How do I know that I have a title to come to him ? I have been a sinner ; must I not reform first, before he will pardon me ? Must I not first get better and live better, before I have a right to trust in him, and to believe my sins are pardoned ? I would also ask you, For whom was the serpent of brass raised up ? Who had a right to look to that, and live ? Was it not set up on purpose for the poor, perishing, bitten Israelite ? Was not the fact that he was dying, his title to look to it ? Was it not made and set up solely for him, and such as he, whom the poison of the fiery serpent's bite was killing ? And did Moses tell him to get better before he looked at the serpent of brass ? Was he not to get better, ay to get well, *by* looking at the serpent of brass ? And so with regard to yourself. Your very sins are your title to look to Jesus. Your interest in him, and your only interest in him, is because you are a perishing sinner. If you know yourself to be a grievous sinner, if you feel your sins many and heavy, let that give you confidence to go to him ; you are the very one who stands in need of him ; you have the strongest possible claim on him—the claim of

ruin, the claim of being lost. For the lost only did he come, by ruined sinners only is he needed; none but perishing, filthy sinners have any right to him. The friend of such he is; the Saviour of such he is; for such he left his glory; for such he became a poor wandering outcast; for such he bled and died. With the good, the righteous, he has nought to do. Look to him, then, *because* you are a sinner: claim him because of your sins. Let your sins convince you of your right to look to him. Let your wretched need and misery be your very title to all his peace and glory. "They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." If you are going to get better without him, you have no need of him. Would a poor dying man, think you, say "I will wait till I get better, before I take the remedy which will cure me"? or would he stop to argue or reason with the doctor about it? No; he would eagerly seize it, and drain every drop of the medicine at once, if told it would do him good; he would hope in it, trust in it; he would wish to be cured; and therefore would cast away his doubts, and anxiously catch at the slightest chance of relief. And so yourself: if you wish for salvation, if you know your need of it, if you feel your perishing state, stop not to reason, stop not to improve, but take the full, perfect remedy:—believe—be confident in the work of Jesus; his precious blood has virtue in it to cleanse from all sin, and freely is it proclaimed to you; only trust in its power to heal and cleanse; only believe that it has been shed and offered unto God as the one sufficient sacrifice for sins for ever,—and all is accomplished, and you are saved.

"God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John iii. 16).

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