

Come Follow Me Podcast  
Elo Viz production  
Week 10  
2 Nephi 20-25

As Nephi continues to refer to Isaiah there is one verse that reminds us of a popular story in the old testament about the children of Israel in the wilderness. It is in 2 Nephi 25 verse 20. It says:

“And now, my brethren, I have spoken plainly that ye cannot err. And as the Lord God liveth that **brought** Israel up out of the land of Egypt, and gave unto Moses power that he should **heal** the nations after they had been bitten by the poisonous serpents, if they would cast their eyes unto the **serpent** which he did raise up before them, and also gave him power that he should smite the **rock** and the water should come forth; yea, behold I say unto you, that as these things are **true**, and as the Lord God liveth, there is none other **name** given under heaven save it be this Jesus Christ, of which I have spoken, whereby man can be saved.” (2 Nephi 25:20)

The story about Moses creating the brass serpent in order to save the children of Israel who had been bitten is a fascinating one. But before this event took place, God delivered the people of Canaan into the hands of the Israelites. Which was a miracle and they knew it. But as they left that place of blessings from God they continued their traveling to a place called Compass and it tells us in Numbers how they quickly forgot what God had just done for them. It reads:

“4 ¶ And they journeyed from mount **Hor** by the way of the **Red sea**, to **compass** the land of Edom: and the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way.  
5 And the people **spake** against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for *there is* no bread, neither *is there any* water; and our soul loatheth this light bread.” (Numbers 21:4)

What were they thinking? God had just barely shown them a miracle. They should have been slaughtered by the people of Canaan. But they weren't instead God delivered them into their hands. And now a little walking in the wilderness and they are already speaking against God and Moses? It goes to show how hard their hearts really were. So what does God do about it?

“6 And the LORD sent **fiery serpents** among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died.” (Numbers 21:6)

Yeah, that would have done it for me. I would have definitely repented very quickly if I was being chased by a poisonous fiery serpent. But some were not able to, and they died. Others ran to Moses and said:

“We have **sinned**, for we have spoken against the LORD, and against thee; pray unto the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us.” (Numbers 21:7)

So He does. Moses who had walked and talked with the Lord, Who understood the character of Christ, quickly forgave them and prayed to the Father for them. And God told Moses:

“**Make** thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall **live**.”

**9** 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 lived.”

(Numbers 21:8-9)

I love this story because it is so strange and different. I totally get why God would send down fiery serpents to the children of Israel. Where things get confusing is when God instructs Moses to make a fiery serpent and to put it on the end of a pole.

Have you ever wondered that? Most scholars believe that the brass serpent represents Jesus Christ. That is pretty obvious, because we all need to look to Jesus who hung on a cross and bore the sins of the world, He is our only hope for salvation and healing. But why a fiery serpent? Why not a lamb, or just a cross? Isn't it strange that in order for them to be healed they needed to look at the very thing that at that time was killing them? The image of a serpent universally symbolized the Devil and his cunning ways. This is why there is so much confusion about this story. Let's look at a few scriptures to try and understand. In 1 Nephi 17 we read this about the children of Israel:

“**41** And he [meaning God] did straiten them in the wilderness with his rod; for they **hardened** their hearts, even as ye have; and the Lord straitened them because of their iniquity. He sent fiery flying **serpents** among them; and after they were bitten he prepared a way that they might be **healed**; and the labor which they had to perform was to look; and because of the **simpleness** of the way, or the easiness of it, there were many who perished.” (1 Nephi 17:41)

Then in Alma:

“**21** O my brethren, if ye could be healed by merely casting about your eyes that ye might be healed, would ye not behold quickly, or would ye rather harden your hearts in **unbelief**, and be **slothful**, that ye would not cast about your eyes, that ye might perish?

**22** If so, wo shall come upon you; but if not so, then cast about your eyes and **begin** to believe in the Son of God, that he will come to redeem his people, and that he shall suffer and die to **atone** for their sins; and that he shall **rise** again from the dead, which shall bring to pass the **resurrection**, that all men shall stand before him, to be **judged** at the last and judgment day, according to their **works**.” (Alma 33:21-22)

Both of these scriptures teach us a lot about this story and the dynamics of the situation. And I'm sure that if you were in that situation that you would have no problem looking at that brass serpent to be healed? Or would you?

I want to share an idea with you that might change your mind. To me it answers the question: Why would some of them refuse to look at the only thing that could possibly save their life.

What if the brass serpent in this story is not Christ, but instead sin? The serpent represented the sin of the people as they spoke out against God. It was their sin that caused them pain and death. That is why it was so hard for them to look. In order to be healed they had to face their sin. And for a lot of them, they were not ready to be that vulnerable.

So how does this apply to us? Last I checked there were no poisonous serpents coming after me when I sin. At least not physically. But this story applies to us in an astounding way spiritually. If the brass serpent represents sin: What sins in your life are you trying to hide from? Which ones have you tucked away and refused to confront? Which ones are filed way down deep in our memory that we never want to dig up again?

This is one of the cultures of the church. We are told to repent and forget. Or for more serious sins: Confess, repent and then forget. But what if this story is teaching a different message?

Think about how different things would be if instead of hiding and forgetting our sins we held them up on the end of a pole for all the world to see. Now, before you run and hide... let me explain what I mean with a story:

Several years ago a friend of mine got up in sacrament meeting and spoke of a struggle he had. His wife was very sick and spent months in bed. He had to do everything with the kids, and work, and carpool. As the months grew into years he grew more angry and distant from his wife as she would sleep most of the day because she didn't have the energy to do much of anything. They grew apart and he said that he started to have a wandering eye. This was in church that he said this. Standing at the pulpit. My friend was literally taking his sin and holding it up for the whole ward to see. It was fantastic, no one in the ward would have guessed that this man had this struggle. If you were sitting in the congregation that day what would you feel about this man? Having known him for a very long time and already being very good friends with him I can tell you that as I witnessed that moment I sat in wonder and amazement at the bravery it took to confess such a deep moment that I felt my love for him grow. I respected him more. I felt more empathy and acceptance for him. All because he was vulnerable with the things he was dealing with.

I began to realize that if I know what sins you are struggling with, and you know what sins I am struggling with, we can turn to each other for help and support when times get tough. We all have sin. To sit there and hide all your sins under a large blanket of pride is to tell everyone around you; I have no need for the atonement, my life is perfect. Which we all know is a lie. Yet, that is the culture we have created around us.

My friend and I were discussing this the other day and he asked me a profound question, he said: If everyone of our friends knew about your deepest and darkest secrets, and still loved you and supported you in spite of what they knew, how freeing would that feel? Is there anything that you would feel you couldn't do, knowing that you would be supported and loved unconditionally, no matter what you failed at?

When I pondered that, he had a very good point. See, we all have these dark secrets that haunt us. That's part of the adversary's plan, to make us feel that if our closest friends knew who we really were, and what we had done in the past to cause us shame, there is no way they would still love us. And that could be true in maybe a very few, one in a million situations but for the most part we think we are hiding so well, but those who love us the most, know us the best.

Maybe this was the magic sauce that got the City of Enoch translated. Maybe their city was so good at Empathy and everyone knew everything about everyone and they loved and supported each other no matter what. That they conquered and overcame all spiritual obstacles together. Maybe they got so good at it that they created their own heaven on earth so God raised them up to be with Him. It's a very good possibility.

Now, just so we don't mis-understand, I am not suggesting that we turn open mic Sunday into a sin confessing fiesta. That would probably not have the effect we are looking for. What I am suggesting is that we take those moments as directed by the spirit and we be a little more vulnerable. We might find it appropriate to share a piece of our life's struggles with another that is in a similar situation, someone who is walking down that dark path that you once navigated who is needing a friendly hand, or a word of encouragement. As directed by the spirit might we be willing to free ourselves from the heavy chains of sin that we have been carrying around for so long. Trusting that those we love, will continue to love us no matter what we have been through. I think that you will find that it is contagious. As you share your vulnerability that others will in turn open up to you. Giving you a change to show Christ-like love and empathy to others who also have been carrying a heavy load as well.

Might I conclude by repeating the early verse from Alma 33. With a new light shining on this subject please consider his plead:

“O my brethren [and sisters], if ye could be healed by merely casting about your eyes that ye might be healed, would ye not behold quickly? then cast about your eyes and **begin** to believe in the Son of God, that he will come to redeem his people, and that he shall suffer and die to **atone** for [your] sins; and that he shall **rise** again from the dead, which shall bring to pass the **resurrection**, that all men shall stand before him, to be **judged** at the last and judgment day, according to their **works**.” (Alma 33:21-22)

My humble prayer is that we have the courage to look and live, In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.