

Who Needs A Fiery Serpent?

June 18, 2007

As some are already aware, I had an opportunity to go with Derald Boman to Okeene, Oklahoma to the annual rattlesnake roundup last weekend. Every year one of the local ranchers invites snake hunting enthusiasts to try their skills against one of the most dangerous snakes in America - the diamondback! With 16 inch snake-proof boots, a pinner (a device for picking up snakes), and a gunny sack, we ventured into one of western Oklahoma's canyons in hope to nab a big one. Ten minutes from the truck and about a third of the way up the canyon wall we quickly recognized the sound of rattling buttons from the vibrating tail of a diamondback only a few feet away. With adrenaline flowing, the heart frantically racing, and blood pumping ferociously, Derald takes the pinner while I'm close behind with the gunny sack and together we catch our first snake!

I'm not sure what motivated two men in their late 40's to even consider going to a rattlesnake roundup much less be a participant; and though some thought we should have had our heads examined, we were determined to go anyway; and off we went. While we were traveling to Okeene I was excited! After our arrival I became a little more apprehensive; and while climbing the canyon wall I was just plain scared! Though there was no reception signal whatsoever I still carried my cell phone with me as a security blanket just in case one of us was bitten and we happened to find ourselves in that one pocket area where the signal amazingly became strong again, and one of us had to make that three-digit call for help.

After we encountered our first rattlesnake I happened to think about the people of God who wandered in the wilderness due to their unbelief and disobedience, and how they could look upon the brass serpent for divine healing and providential protection should they be bitten by poisonous snakes (Numbers 21:4-9) - snakes that God sent them to begin with because of their murmuring against God and Moses. Nonetheless it was God who made the provision for salvation. It wasn't the brass serpent that saved the people; it was God. There wasn't any inherent power of healing and protection in a brazen serpent erected on some pole, for later on one can read about it eventually becoming an object of worship which King Hezekiah tore down in an effort to restore true worship once again for the people of God (2 Kings 18:4). That which was provided by God for the people to look upon for salvation unfortunately became the very object of their worship - their trust no longer was in God the Provider, it was in the object provided

By an easy transition it becomes apparent that some folks in certain religious circles today place more emphasis and trust in the cross which Christ was offered upon rather than the sacrificial offering himself. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up. That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:14-15). The Lord did not intend that His people worship the cross any more than He intended for Judah to worship a brass serpent on a pole. In John 3 the context shows that salvation would come to those who through obedient faith were born again (John 3:1-5) just like those in the wilderness who through obedient faith could be saved when they looked upon the brass serpent.

There are other items of great significance mentioned in the scriptures which people are seemingly more interested in locating their whereabouts than they are in understanding their significance - the garden of Eden, Noah's ark, the ark of the covenant, the tomb of Jesus, and many others. The curious fascination of these items often cause folks to long for their discovery, all the while they refuse to seek and follow the One who could make them wise unto salvation (2 Timothy 3:15). Clearly their emphasis is placed in the wrong thing as they seek to walk by sight and not by faith. Obviously they are governed not by the spiritual but by the carnal (Romans 8:5-8). Who among us could not see such folly?

But, are we that far removed from their misguided undertaking? When one emphasizes the aesthetics of a church building in which to worship instead of offering reverential worship he too has become carnally minded. When one complains over the length of a sermon but has no problem setting aside the same amount of time for pleasurable recreation he, like they, has become carnally minded. When one would rather hear a smooth-talking, ear-tickling orator in the pulpit than a scripture-filled, doctrinally sound, gospel sermon it's a sure sign of being carnally minded. When one is more interested in reaching the final announcements during worship than the main exhortation and admonition he's governed by something, but it's not the spiritual. When one would rather hurry to associate with worldly friends than to be in fellowship with spiritual family he, without a doubt, is carnally minded.

When these and other similar attitudes occur in our hearts and lives how is it that we are any different than those of Judah who misplaced the emphasis of a fiery serpent on a pole? Have we not forgotten the WHO, WHYS, and WHEREFORES of salvation and worship? Who Needs A Fiery Serpent on a pole to keep us from a brazen devil? Though we may never be envenomed by a slithering cold-blooded reptile, that doesn't mean we are not in danger of being poisoned by the deceptive darts of

carnality which the devil subtly throws our way. If that happens, what are we to do, and to whom shall we turn? Upon whom shall we look for salvation?

The writer of Hebrews said, "...let us lay aside every weight , and the sin which doth so easily beset us,...looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith..." (Hebrew 12:1-2)

BJF Newsletter 06-13-07 Volume 1, Number 9