

My text this morning is a very short and simple one. It comes from Isaiah 45:22: "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else." The NIV translates the verse, "Turn to me and be saved all you ends of the earth." There is no great difference in the two translations however. The Hebrew word means to turn with the purpose of looking. The nations were looking to their idols to help them. God, however, calls the nations to turn from their idols and look to Him, the Living God.

Our text is particularly meaningful to me because few verses state so simply the good news <sup>of God.</sup> ~~that God has for us.~~ Few verses express so well God's desire to save. There is a strong parallel here with two other passages of Scripture which associate salvation simply with looking. In the book of Numbers we read of how the children of Israel were suffering from the poisonous bites of serpents. Men and women were dieing. God instructed Moses to make a brass figure of a snake, attach it to a long pole, and lift it up for all to look at. Then he called all Israel to look at that uplifted brass serpent and those who did were healed and lived. To 20th century minds the story sounds a little magical.

How can looking at a brass serpent affect healing? But if we suspend our 20th century skepticism for a moment we might be able to see in this story how God in his love made it possible for all to be healed simply by looking <sup>wherever they were</sup> ~~wherever they were~~ to that uplifted serpent.

In the NT our Lord refers to that incident in the desert. In John 3:14, 15 he says to Nicodemus, "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." When we look to Jesus lifted up on the cross we too are healed, forgiven, and saved. Or, to put it another way, we cannot look at Jesus as he hangs there on the cross without our hearts eventually melting in love for him who died for us.

There are many things from which we need to be saved. We all, of course, need to be saved from sin and hell and judgment. But we need also to be saved from other things as well. Some need to be saved from loneliness. Some from grief. Some need to be saved from depression. Some from pain. Some need to be saved from destructive habits such as alcoholism. Some from illness, pain, and worry. There are things in the lives of each one of us from which we need to be saved. The words of our text, therefore, <sup>are</sup> ~~is~~ not

simply for the unconverted or for the non-Christian. It is for you and it is for me. It is for all the ends of the earth and for all sorts and conditions of people. There is salvation from war, from tyranny and injustice... there is salvation for those who are most distant from God. "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth."

Charles Spurgeon tells us in his autobiography how God used this text to save him from fear and anxiety over his salvation from hell. I would like to share his account with all of us this morning because he words go right to the heart of our text. He writes,

"I sometimes think I might have been in darkness and despair until now had it not been for the goodness of God in sending a snowstorm, one Sunday morning, while I was going to a certain place of worship. When I could go no further, I turned d<sup>o</sup>wn a side street, and came to a little Primitive Methodist Chapel. In that chapel there may have been <sup>a</sup>dozen or fifteen people. I had heard of the Primitive Methodists, how they sang so loudly that they made people's heads ache; but that did not matter to me. I wanted to know how I might be saved, and if they could tell me that, I did not care how much they made my head ache. The minister did not come that morning; he was snowed up, I suppose. At last,

a very thin-looking man, a shoemaker, or tailor, or something of that sort, went up into the pulpit to preach. Now, it is well that preachers should be instructed (i.e., that they be well educated), but this man was really stupid. He was obliged to stick to his text, for the simple reason that he had little else to say. The text was-- "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth."

"He did not even pronounce the words rightly, but that did not matter. There was, I thought, a glimpse of hope for me in that text. The preacher began thus: 'My dear friends, this is a very simple text indeed. It says, "Look, Now lookin' don't take a deal of pain. It ain't liftin your foot or your finger; it is just, "Look." Well, a man needn't go to College to learn to look. You may be the biggest fool, and yet you can look. A man needn't be worth a thousand a year to be able to look. Anyone can look; even a child can look. But then the text says, "Look unto Me." Ay!' said he, ..."Many on ye are lookin' to yourselves, but it's no use looking there. You'll never find any comfort in yourselves. Some look to God the Father, No, look to Him by-and-by. Jesus Christ says, "Look unto Me." Some on ye say, "We must wait for the Spirit's workin'." You have no business with that just now. Look to Christ. The text says, "Look unto Me."



Then the lay-preacher followed up his text by using his imagination and speaking to the people as Christ might speak to them from the cross. "Look unto Me; I am sweatin' great drops of blood. Look unto Me; I am hangin' on the cross. Look unto Me; I am dead and buried. Look unto Me; I rise again. Look unto Me; I ascend to Heaven. Look unto Me; I am sittin' at the Father's right hand. O ppor sinner, look unto Me! look unto Me!"

He went on like this for some length of time and managed to spin out about 10 minutes of a sermon when he came to the end of his tether and couldn't think of anything else to say. Then he looked at Spurgeon, a boy of about 17 years of age, sitting under a balcony. There were so few present that morning that the lay-preacher knew Spurgeon was a stranger. He fixed his eyes on Spurgeon as if he knew his heart and said, "Young man, you look very miserable." Well, Spurgeon was feeling miserable, but he wasn't used to having remarks made from the pulpit on his personal appearance before. It was a good blow, however, as it turned out. It struck home. He continued, "and you always will be miserable-- miserable in life, and miserable in death-- if you don't obey my text; but if you obey now, this moment, you will be saved."

Then the lay-preacher lifted up his hands and started shouting as only a Primitive Methodist could do, "Young man, look to Jesus Christ. Look! Look! Look! You have nothin' to do but to look and live." Spurgeon saw at once the way of salvation. Later in his autobiography he wrote, "I know not what else he said-- I did not take much notice of it-- I was so possessed with that one thought. Like as when the brazen serpent was lifted up, the people only looked and were healed, so it was with me. Look! What a charming word it seemed to me! I looked until I could almost have looked my eyes away. There and then the cloud was gone, the darkness had rolled away, and that moment I saw the sun."

Let me conclude with another story of a man who proved the trustworthiness of our text of Scripture when he looked to Christ. I read the story in a little book by D.T. Niles who was a leader in the World Council of Churches before his death a number of years ago. The story was originally told by a famous French Roman Catholic bishop. Three university students of Paris were walking along the road one Good Friday afternoon. They noticed crowds of people going to the churches to make their confession. The students began to discuss this custom of the "unenlightened," and talked in rather cynical terms about the survival of religion which they described

as superstition. Suddenly two of the students turned to the third, who was the leader among them, and said to him, "Will you go into this church and tell the priest there what we have been saying to each other?" "Sure, I will," he said, and went in. He stood in the line of those who were going to their confession, and when his turn came, he looked at the priest and said, "Father, I have come here merely to tell you that Christianity is a dying institution and that religion is a superstition." The priest looked at the young man keenly and said, "Why did you come here, my son, to tell me this?" And the student told him of his conversation with his friends. The priest listened carefully and then said; "All right, I want you to do one thing for me before you go. You accepted the challenge of your friends and came here; now accept my challenge to you. Walk up to the chancel and you will find there a large wooden cross and on it the figure of Jesus crucified. I want you to stand before that cross and say these words: "Jesus died for me and I don't care a damn."

The student looked diffident but, to save face, agreed. He went up and stood before that cross and said it: "Jesus died for me and I don't care a damn." He came back to the priest and said, "I have done it." "Do it once more," said

the priest; "after all it means nothing to you." The student went back and looked at the cross for some time and the figure on it, and then he stammered it out: "Jesus died for me and I don't care a damn." He returned to the priest and said, "I have done it; I am going now." The priest stopped him. "Once more," he said, "just once more and you can go." The young man walked up to the chancel and looked at that cross again, and at the Crucified. He stood there for a long time. Then he came back to the priest and said, "Father, can I make my confession now?"

No-one, not even the most hardened and cynical unbeliever can look for long at Christ crucified without the power of that cross working a wonderful transformation in the heart. But we all need to look to Christ, and not just the unbeliever. Are you lonely? Are you anxious? Are you depressed? Are you hurting? You cannot look to Christ crucified without seeing there that God loves you and has taken upon himself all of your grief and sorrow, your fear and anxiety, your despair and guilt. As you leave the church this morning I would like you to see this vision of Christ crucified for you. "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else."

AMEN