

THE DRAWING POWER OF JESUS

“But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself. He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.” (John 12:32-33)

- The British surrendered at Yorktown on Oct. 19, 1781.
- Geronimo surrendered along the Arizona, New Mexico border on Sept. 4, 1886.
- Germany surrendered at Rheims, France on May 7, 1945.
- Japan surrendered aboard the Battleship Missouri on Sept. 6, 1945.

All of these surrenders came as the result of brute force. In war, the conquered either surrender or are killed. Sometimes, as you know, the conquered choose death. The inhabitants of Masada, for example, chose to die rather than be conquered by the Romans.

Jesus, by contrast, conquers people by the power of love. He draws disciples to Himself and doesn't force anybody to do anything. We come to Christ only when we want to. When the fickle multitudes abandoned Him, Jesus told His disciples that they could also leave (Jn. 6:67). The door of escape from following Jesus is always open. You know this is true! We are drawn ahead to Jesus, not forced from behind. This kind of Kingdom is so radically different that one has to be born again in order to see it (Jn. 3:3).

Napoleon reflected upon the Kingdom of Christ and said: “Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and myself founded empires; but what foundation did we rest the creations of our genius? Upon force. Jesus Christ founded an empire upon love; and at this hour millions of men would die for Him.”

The symbolism of our text comes from Hebrew history. As the people of God traveled from Mt. Hor to the Red Sea they grew impatient and began to complain (see Nu. 21:4 - 9). They criticized both God and Moses. They even detested the miraculous manna that God had given them from heaven. When the Lord sent venomous snakes among them they repented and asked Moses to pray for their deliverance. Then the Lord said to Moses: **“Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live.” (Num 21:8)** Jesus used this story to demonstrate the power of His cross. He said: **“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.” (John 3:14-15)** John later explain that when Jesus spoke of being “lifted up” He was talking about the cross (Jn. 12:33).

While no one was actually “forced” to look at the bronze snake, we must admit the obvious association between the snake bites and their desire. Under normal circumstances they might be too busy to walk to the center of the camp and focus on the snake. When death is imminent, however, our priorities often change. So also with Christ. Those who naively assume that they will live forever will probably not be interested. When cancer, or other deadly diseases force us to face our own mortality, Christ and the cross come more sharply into focus.

This helps us to understand the words of Jesus when He said blessed are the hungry (Lk. 6:21, and woe to the full (Lk. 6:25). Only those who recognize that they are dying are eager for deliverance. Gravity is that unseen force that draws all objects toward the center of the earth. Gravity cannot move those objects, however, as long as they are firmly attached. So also people do not move to Christ until they sever their ties with this present world. In this regard the painful sting of death can sometimes prompt us to seek unconventional solutions.

Isaiah knew that Jesus would not be popular. In fact, he said he would be like a “tender shoot” with “no beauty”. Moreover, He would be “despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with suffering.”. In fact, Jesus would be so undesirable that men would “hide their faces” from Him (Is. 53:1 - 3).