

Text: Luke 2:21-35

Title: Simeon and the Baby Messiah

Truth: Jesus is dedicated, and Simeon sees in Him salvation for the world.

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Introduction

Luke has introduced us to Zacharias, Elizabeth, Gabriel, Mary, Joseph, John the Baptist, Jesus, and the shepherds. Now he will bring another man into our viewport: Simeon.

Simeon offers a sterling example of character and conduct for us. As he behaved regarding the first Christmas, so we ought to be now. He was a just man, a devout man, one anticipating the coming of the Messiah, and one filled with the Holy Spirit (Luke 2:25). He was right in his dealings with man and with God. Other people in the Bible are described with terms like that—and *you too* could be described like that if you are truly so. For instance, **Enoch** pleased God (Gen. 5:24, Heb. 11:5). **Noah** was a man of faith (Heb. 11:7) who was righteous before God (Gen. 7:1). **Job** was blameless and upright (1:1). **Abraham** was a “friend of God” (James 2:23). God spoke with **Moses**, as a man does with his friend (Exodus 33:11). **Stephen** was full of faith and the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:5). **Barnabas** was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith (Acts 11:24). **David** was a man after God’s own heart, loyal to God (Acts 13:22, 1 Sam. 13:14). Then there were **Zacharias** and **Elizabeth**, who were righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord (Luke 1:6). We should also mention **Abel**, and **Joseph**, and **Joshua** and **Caleb**. But of all these, only two saw the Lord in the temple that special day when he was dedicated to God. One was **Simeon**. The other was **Anna**, a woman who served God with fasting and prayer night and day.

I. Is Christmas About Giving?

A. Usually this passage is associated with Christmas. That holiday probably conjures up images of giving and how it should impact us: God gave → so we give.

- B. But are we really giving like God gave? Or is our giving altogether different in character and motivation? When we give gifts to one another, are we really giving an example of God-like behavior? Is our practice connected to His practice of giving? Are we supporting the weak in our giving (Acts 20:35)? Are we modeling how He became poor so we could become rich (2 Cor. 8:9)? Are we giving to those who have need, like the poor among the saints in Jerusalem (Rom. 15:26, 2 Cor 8-9, 1 Cor. 16:1-4, Acts 11:27-30)? Are we really honoring Christ in our Christmas celebrations?
- C. But thinking a little deeper, is even this idea “God gave → so we give” even right? Is this how we should really think about Christmas? This simple statement skips over critical elements of the equation, making the work of God in Christ a mere example of philanthropic giving meant to induce us to give. The world of Christendom is rife with this notion: Christmas is about having a giving spirit. But Christ’s death was not just an example—it was far more than that. It was a payment of a penalty, punishment for moral wrongdoing—mine and yours.
- D. Christ’s death does indeed instruct us what real giving looks like, but it goes farther. There are parts of the equation in the middle: God gave → to save us from sin → to make us righteous → and to provide eternal life → to make us act holy, loving, giving, forgiving, etc. The example theory of the atonement leaves out the underlined middle steps which are absolutely essential for the proper understanding that Christ came to die in our place for sin to save us from death. Simeon knew this. What he saw was far more than just a warm-fuzzy holiday with a “giving spirit.” He saw the very salvation of God to rescue his people from evil and oppression.

II. Background – Circumcision and Consecration, 2:21-24

- A. Luke 2:21 says that Jesus was eight days old when he was circumcised. This is also when he was officially named by his parents as directed by the angel in Matt. 1:21 and Luke 1:31. The eight days is from Genesis 17:12 where the sign of the Abrahamic covenant is to be performed on all the male children 8 days old.

- B. In Luke 2:22 the text says that “when the days of her purification according to the Law of Moses were completed, they brought Him to Jerusalem.” A measurement of the time between these two events is available from Leviticus 12, which is the passage that is referred to in Luke 2:24. We see in Leviticus that the total number of days of purification were 40 (since she had a boy; it would be 80 days for a girl). Therefore, about 33 days after the circumcision, the mother and father would come and offer a lamb and either a pigeon or turtledove as sacrifices to the Lord so that she would become ritually clean again after the birth. If the mother was poor, she could bring two pigeons or two turtledoves instead. This is what Jesus’ parents did. Note that the first Christmas occurred in thorough poverty. This is quite unlike the spectacle made of Christmas in many families today.
- C. Note that the uncleanness and atonement and cleansing are for the mother, not the child, because Jesus was completely clean and had no part in any ceremonial defilement. This instruction does not indicate that the child is a sinner, though every child except Jesus is a sinner. It does not indicate that reproduction is sinful, for it is commanded by God. The passing of blood rendered a woman unclean (monthly, or with childbirth). With childbirth, not only was there blood, but the parents were responsible for bringing another sinner into the world. A girl brought with her the stigma of Eve’s disobedience against God, perhaps thus doubling the length of the impurity. There is no such impurity under the Law of Christ. Particularly for a believer in Christ whose sins are washed away this is true.
- D. Under the Mosaic Law (Exodus 13:2, 12) the firstborn male child was specifically designated by God as His own. “Holy” means “set apart” to the Lord. So, Jesus was not only circumcised, but he was also consecrated (presented) to God. This included an offering of five shekels of silver (Num. 18:16, 3:46-48) to “redeem” the child, to “buy it back” from God’s possession (Exodus 13:13). All the firstborn of Israelite animals and people belonged to the priests as their support. Firstborn animals could be sacrificed, but people could not, so a price was paid instead to the priests. This is what the five shekels of silver did. [A modern shekel is worth about a

quarter. In the NT era, a shekel of silver was about 1/3 of a troy ounce, or 11 grams. Today, at \$23.05 per ounce of silver, that would equate to about \$9 worth of silver, or \$45 for 5 shekels.]

- E. Joseph and Mary followed these OT laws from Leviticus and Exodus just as God instructed (2:27).
- F. Maybe this next point is obvious to us, but I want to emphasize that if you are a parent, birth is not just a medical event in your life. It is a *religious* event. Whether we fully understand the Levitical code and its purification rituals, we can understand that God is connecting birth to religious and spiritual meaning. We do not have the specific regulations of the Law of Moses, but we still do have its principles, and childbirth today is no less significant than it was then. We might tend to think of death in a more religious way, but at conception and birth, a new LIFE is started. A soul comes into existence. A sinner is born. Eternity is changed because an eternal person comes into existence and will be somewhere in eternity forever. The least we can do is recognize God has given life, and thank Him, and do so widely with our family and friends. Birth announcements function this way—years ago in the newspaper, today via postcard-type mailings and social media and in church and dedication services and email, etc.

III. What Simeon Saw, 2:29-32

- A. Simeon saw God's fulfillment of a personal promise, 2:29. In verse 26 we are told that the Spirit of God told Simeon that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah. What a blessed promise. When he enters the temple, Simeon supernaturally knows that God's promise has been fulfilled. He has seen the Messiah, the one born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14) for whom he had been waiting so patiently. This consolation was the hope of every faithful Jew of that day. They awaited the fulfillment of Isaiah 40:1 (Comfort, yes, comfort my people) and Isaiah 66:12-14. How could Simeon respond with other than praise and exaltation of God?

God fulfills all His promises—yes, even those to you! He promises life for those who believe in Jesus Christ. He will make good on His

promise, and then the believer will experience the great relief and joy like Simeon had.

- B. Simeon saw salvation, 2:30. This salvation was deliverance in all aspects—physical and spiritual. Remember Zacharias Benedictus in which he reflected on the salvation of God “from enemies” and “by the remission of their sins” (Luke 1:71, 77) in both its physical and spiritual dimensions. We concentrate on the spiritual dimension, because we are not the nation Israel with its national and political promises.

The focus of Simeon was on the person, the little baby in his arms. This person IS salvation Himself. He is not ancillary or supplementary or secondary to salvation. He is not the heavy-lifter than then, after work is done, moves out of the way and lets His glory go to another. Christ is, was, and always will be salvation. It is all of Christ! We must not miss this focus. If we are to experience salvation, we must meet Jesus, not just intellectually accept a few facts as true about his death and resurrection. We are believing *into Jesus*.

Simeon’s spiritual perception challenges us. When we look around here, for instance, we might think of the furniture and decorations and things and think “this place really looks like a church.” But a first-century Christian would have never seen it that way. The church is not a building. Born-again believers are the church. That’s what the church looks like to one with spiritual perception. Some perceive Jesus as merely a model or example for us, a good man, a teacher. Proper spiritual perception, however, makes it clear that Jesus is far more than that—he is *salvation* itself. Simeon saw rightly—salvation was before him, in his arms.

- C. Simeon saw a world-wide Savior, 2:31-32.

1. This salvation is prepared before the face of all peoples—Jew and Gentile. Jesus provides salvation to all nations (Rev. 5:9), and this was done in front of everyone, so it was not hidden. Luke 3:6 says, “all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”
2. The Messiah is a light for revelation to the Gentiles. He said, “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12), and several prophetic

passages speak of Him this way (Isa 42:6, 49:6, 60:1-3; Acts 13:47, 26:23). Light is the opposite of darkness (Matt. 4:16). Many sit in a darkened state today and need to see the light as well (Eph. 4:18; 2 Cor. 4:6). Christ reveals the way of salvation from sin to God. In fact, this revelation is the revealing of God Himself to the peoples who are in great darkness (Isaiah 9:1-4, 42:7, Matt. 4:16).

3. Simeon says the Messiah is the Glory of the people of Israel. There is no Jew who is more glorious. There is no one else more famous, and certainly no one else who provides salvation. He is the Jew of all Jews. Of all that the Jewish people have given to the world (Rom. 9:4-5), Jesus Christ is the pinnacle most glorifying to God. Because he took on flesh, the world observed His glory (John 1:14).

IV. What Simeon Prophesied, 2:34-35

- A. After undoubtedly reveling in the moment for a while, Simeon turned to Jesus' parents and offered a blessing to them. This they needed, for they were still acclimating to this whole notion of raising the Savior of the world (2:33 indicates their bewilderment). Soon Herod would seek the young Child to destroy Him, and they would be making a hasty trip to Egypt. Herod died after Jesus was 1 or 2 years old, and the family returned from Egypt. Many difficult months lie ahead for the new family with little financial means. A special blessing would be an encouragement.
- B. Simeon prophesied that Christ is the revealer of hearts, 2:34, 35b. Simeon focuses on the effect that the Messiah will have on the nation of Israel. It will be a two-fold effect. On the one hand, many Jews will fall when they fail to believe in Him. He is a stumbling stone of Isaiah 8:14-15. Romans 9:32-33 and 1 Peter 2:8 reflect the same notion. The "falling" or stumbling comes by being disobedient to the message of Christ and thus being judged by God. These are the same ones who treat Christ like a sign to be spoken against. This conjures up our thoughts about Christ's many miracles which were authenticating signs, the most notable of which was the resurrection (Matt. 12:39). Here though it seems that Christ himself is the sign, a signal of God's salvation. And yet

He will be “spoken against.” This opposition came out in the open when the people called for His crucifixion and mocked Him on the cross. Those activities show their absolute rejection of Jesus.

On the other hand, many will rise because of Christ. This means they will receive blessing, such as Ephesians 1:3, 2:6 and Colossians 3:1, ultimately in “rising” to new life. A similar two-fold outcome for Jews is mentioned in Daniel 12:2-3.

As we can see, the result of the life and ministry of Christ is that “the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed” (end of verse 35). Your response to Christ and his suffering, whether to accept or reject Him, opens the window of your heart. There is no neutral ground here – only “for” or “against.”

- C. Simeon prophesied Mary’s grief, 2:35a. The treatment of her Son throughout His life, and particularly at his crucifixion, would be painful to behold. Think of it – as she stood by and watched him crucified like a common criminal (John 19:25) – what would her thoughts be? “Pained in the heart” is far too mild a way to say it. She would be stricken down with grief and pain, as if someone was cutting her soul out with a sword. To achieve the rising of many in Israel, He would suffer the scorn of many others, even down to the present. There would be much suffering, not just glory...

Conclusion

If we believe like Simeon and live like him, we will do well. His standard was righteousness toward men and devoutness toward God.

If we see Jesus as Simeon saw him, we will also do well. He saw salvation right before his eyes. He saw suffering in Christ’s future and salvation for those who trust in Him. He saw Jesus as the test of people’s hearts, whether they would believe and rise, or reject and fall. Jesus is a refuge, but He is also a stone of stumbling (Isaiah 8:14).

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