

The Heights Baptist Church

* Christmas at Luke's * Jesus Presented at the Temple * Luke 2:21-40 * 12/19/2021 *

MAIN POINT

Simeon, who was righteous and devout, saw Jesus and recognized the Savior and praised God, saying, "My eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared..." We, as redeemed people, need to remember to praise God for sending the Messiah and allowing us to recognize him too.

INTRODUCTION

According to Ephesians 2:4-6, even though we as Christians are still living on this earth, God sees us as already glorified with Christ (Romans 8:30).

When we are going through difficult times here on earth, how might we lose sight of the fact we will soon be glorified with Christ in heaven?

When things are going well for us here on Earth, how might we lose sight of the fact we will soon be glorified with Christ in Heaven?

Many of us plan for our retirement, or at least fret about it. We save money in 401Ks hoping that it will be enough to last us. Usually, we dream about being able to travel with our spouse, take time with grandkids, and have the leisure to do the things we want that we could not do while working. But do we focus enough on looking forward to our heavenly home? And do we focus enough on how we can be serving God while we are still here on earth? Today we will look at two older people who were walking with God while patiently longing for the arrival of the Messiah.

UNDERSTANDING

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ LUKE 2:21-24.

What events happened in these four verses?

HAVE VOLUNTEERS READ GENESIS 17:9-12, LEVITICUS 12:6-8, AND EXODUS 13:1-2, 11-15

Joseph and Mary were obeying God's law when they completed the actions we read about in Luke 2:21-24. We see them obeying God in the circumcision, purification, and consecration laws.

At Jesus' first coming, God chose to have His Son enter the world through humble circumstances, as seen in His birth in a stable, His being placed in a manger, and the announcement of His birth to shepherds. Here we have another example. God's law specified that the sacrifice required for purification was a year old lamb and a young pigeon or dove. Or, if she couldn't afford a lamb, she was to bring two doves or two young pigeons, which is what Mary brought.

Note to study leader: The following discussion looks a little deeper at the Old Testament laws Joseph and Mary were complying with when they circumcised Jesus, complied with the purification rites, and presented Jesus at the Temple. The main part of this lesson is intended to look at Simeon and Anna's response to seeing the Christ child. Depending on where your group is spiritually, and also on time constraints you may have, you may choose to skip the following discussion looking at potential meanings behind these laws.

We read in Colossians 2:17 and Hebrews 10:1 that the law is only a shadow, and that the reality is found in Christ. The circumcision and purification laws picture spiritual truth.

Circumcision was a sign of God's covenant with Abraham (Genesis 17:9-11; Romans 4:11). It also pictured separation from sin and devotion to God (Deuteronomy 30:6; Romans 2:28-29).

Read Galatians 6:15 and Colossians 2:11-12. The physical act means nothing for us in the Church. What counts is the new creation. And the physical circumcision performed by Israel in the Old Testament pictures what Christ has done for us, putting off our sinful nature.

Purification rites were related to that fact that after giving birth, a woman was considered ceremonially unclean for a period of time, and afterward, she was to present a burnt offering and a sin offering, where after she would be "ceremonially clean from her flow of blood" (Leviticus 12:6-7). Remember that becoming ceremonially unclean under the Old Testament Law was not the same as sinning, and that these ceremonial laws do not apply to the church. Spiritual pictures related to purification rites are not as clear as the picture included in circumcision which was spelled out in Romans 2 and Colossians 2. We see from Leviticus 15 that bodily discharges, both normal and abnormal, from both men and women, made them ceremonially unclean.

Per the "Enduring Word" Bible Commentary on Leviticus 15 (<https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/levutucys-15/>), there may be several reasons or pictures for the laws concerning purification and bodily discharges.

1. "These laws... would undeniably provide a measure of good hygiene..."
2. "In a radical way, this separated Israel from the spiritual and sexual practices of the surrounding peoples." Pagan nations carried out sexual activities at their temples as part of their cultic worship practices. Israelites who were ceremonially unclean were not allowed to enter the tabernacle or later the temple areas.
3. "The two (blood and semen) are connected with symbols of redemption and life...". The life of a creature is in its blood (Leviticus 17:11, 14). Read Ephesians 2:1-5; Matthew 23:27-28; and Romans 7:18. Without Christ, we are dead in our sins. These laws remind us that without Christ, we are spiritually dead, and that nothing good lives in us, that is, in our sinful nature. But we have been made alive with Christ!

Consecration of the firstborn. This required a sacrifice to redeem the firstborn of every womb in Israel. Exodus 13:14-15 describes the purpose of this sacrifice. "In days to come, when your son asks you, 'What does this mean?' say to him, 'With a mighty hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. ¹⁵ When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the LORD killed the firstborn of both people and animals in Egypt. This is why I sacrifice to the LORD the first male offspring of every womb and redeem each of my firstborn sons.'"

Slavery in Egypt is a picture of our slavery to sin before we were redeemed by Christ. And when the LORD came to kill the firstborn of Egypt, he passed over those who were under the blood of the Passover lamb that had been brushed on their doorposts. We would not be spiritually alive without God having redeemed us in Christ (Eph. 2:1-2, 12-13). What a picture of what Jesus did for us on the cross!

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ LUKE 2:25-35.

How would you describe Simeon, based on these verses?

What was Simeon waiting for? What do you think “the consolation of Israel” means?

Simeon was “righteous” and “devout”. This emphasizes his close relationship with God. In addition, he was “waiting for the consolation of Israel.” The Greek word for “consolation” is “paraklesis”, which can be translated as consolation, encouragement, comfort, or refreshment. This referred to the hope Israel had in regard to God’s plan for the nation, specifically in regard to the coming of the Messiah. Simeon lived with the anticipation that God’s promised Deliverer could come at any time.

What we learn from Simeon is that an intimate, personal relationship with God enables us to respond to God’s leading. He was anticipating the Messiah’s coming, which indicates he took God’s promises seriously. In addition, he was “moved by the Holy Spirit” (v. 27). Finally, Simeon was worshiping God in the temple. God communicated Jesus’ identity and mission while Simeon was worshiping Him.

What does Simeon prophesy about the mission of Jesus?

The word translated “Gentiles” in verse 32 is from the Greek word *ethnos*, meaning “nations.” It’s the same word Jesus used in the Great Commission, “go and make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19). The coming of Jesus was more than a fulfillment of Israel’s messianic hopes. Jesus is the light revealing and providing God’s way of salvation for all people. Though Israel has always had a special place in God’s plan, God’s plan of redemption includes both Jews and Gentiles. (See Isa. 40:5; 42:6; 49:6; 52:9-10.).

How does Jesus cause the rise and fall of many in Israel?

Jesus taught that He is “the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6). This greatly offended many self-righteous Pharisees and others because they thought they would be saved by keeping the law of Moses. The Jews who opposed Jesus did so because they counted on earning their own way to heaven, and it offended them that Jesus would call on them to repent and trust in Him as the only way to Heaven. They fell because of their pride, and many people, both Jews and Gentiles, fall because of that reason to this very day.

How is Jesus still the cause of the rising and falling of people today?

The truth of Christ’s coming, while welcomed by some, is threatening to others. We need to remember that the salvation we have received in Christ is completely undeserved. We did

nothing to earn it-it is the result of the unmerited kindness of God being showered freely on us. There may have even been a time in our lives when we openly opposed the gospel. Knowing that we are going to face opposition and that we, too, were once dead in our sins will help us be prepared to express grace to others and point them to Christ even in the face of their opposition.

The coming of Jesus is not just a heart-warming, feel-good story. Jesus was destined to cause the fall and rise of many. This prophecy asserted two opposite reactions to Jesus. Division would result from His life and ministry as some would fall in judgment while others would rise in salvation. Some of Jesus' own people would reject Him. Jesus would cause division and opposition even as He went about bringing reconciliation, redemption, and salvation.

Why would a sword pierce Mary's heart as well?

Mary would witness Christ's death on the cross, which would be excruciating for any mother (John 19:25).

Simeon received an amazing promise from the Lord that he would behold the Messiah in the flesh. For thousands of years, the people of Israel had waited for the Messiah, and it would be Simeon's privilege to hold Him in his arms. Each day Simeon went to the temple, he must have been aware that it could be day that he would see the Messiah. This promise probably helped him and encouraged him to do his work when he was tired or discouraged. We, too, have a promise that we will see the Lord. We will see the Lord face to face, and Jesus has promised to reward us for our faithful service to Him. Like Simeon, we ought to look forward to meeting the Lord's Messiah!

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ LUKE 36-40.

How does Luke describe Anna, and what does he say about her message to the people?

Anna was a widow for many years. The text seems to indicate that she was only married seven years before her husband died, and she remained serving in the temple day and night until she was at least 84 years old, or possibly had been a widow for 84 years. In that time, Anna would fast in order to dedicate herself to prayer for her people and for the Kingdom of the Lord.

Luke doesn't provide detail about the message Anna spoke about the child. Her message was for all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem. The Greek word for redemption is "lytrosis", which is translated as a ransoming, redemption, or deliverance.

APPLICATION

Looking at the lives of Simeon and Anna, what about their lives stands out to you?

How can we, like them, keep our focus on Jesus?

Through Jesus, God's salvation has been made available to all people. How can you help get this message out to my family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, and even to the ends of the earth?

PRAYER

Praise God for the salvation He has provided in Jesus. Ask the Father to give us hearts like Simeon and Anna, who looked forward to the coming Messiah, and after meeting Jesus, told eagerly told others about him. Ask Him to help us keep our focus on Jesus and to become more aware of opportunities to share with others the message of salvation made available through Him.

COMMENTARY

LUKE 2:22-38

2:22-24. The “time for their purification” lasted another 33 days after the child’s circumcision (Lv 12:2-8). “To present Him to the Lord” was what was done with “every male who first opens the womb” in Israel (Ex 13:2,12).

2:23-24. “This part, verses 1 and 2 and 11 through 16, speak of acknowledging God's ownership. It speaks of the consecration of the firstborn and this passage emphasizes that we belong to God and that possession of us by God must be tangibly confessed and manifested in our lives.... The idea is much more here like Paul says in Romans 12 verse 1 — “Therefore I urge you brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.” You are to realize in the very act of the ritual of devotion that you yourself belong to God. You wouldn't be here if it were not for His redemption. And especially the children, the firstborn males of Israel, would not be here were it not for the Passover lamb. We must see ourselves, our own lives, as a stewardship that we owe to God. We are stewards of ourselves not just of what we have. We give account to ourselves because of what the Lord has done. “We have been bought with a price,” Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6. We are not our own. We belong to the Lord and therefore we must render to Him, not only an account of what He has given us, but of our whole lives. We are to present our bodies, ourselves, as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is our spiritual service of worship.” Dr. Ligon Duncan, Reformed Theological Seminary (rts.edu), *Because of What the Lord Did for Me*.

2:25. Simeon was “righteous”; that is, he kept God’s laws and the laws of his society, behaving well toward others. He also was “devout,” carefully fulfilling prescribed religious duties. Simeon was pious in the deepest and best sense of the word. The combination of the words “righteous” and “devout” stresses that he was conscientious in living out his relationship with God. In addition, Simeon was “waiting for the consolation of Israel.” This referred to the hope Israel had in regard to God’s plan for the nation. More specifically, it referred to the Messiah’s role in that plan. Simeon lived with the anticipation that God’s promised Deliverer could come at any time. Significantly, the Holy Spirit was on Simeon continuously. This marked him as someone special and qualified him as a credible witness concerning Jesus’ messiahship. The truth for believers’ consideration today is that an intimate, personal relationship with God enables them to respond to God’s leading. Simeon represented genuine, godly piety among God’s people—the highest quality of Old Testament faith.

2:26. In some manner, the Holy Spirit had revealed to Simeon that he would live to see the Lord’s Messiah. God honored Simeon’s fervent anticipation of seeing with his own eyes the long-awaited Deliverer. Some interpreters view the promise that Simeon “would not die before” the fulfillment of his hope as evidence he was elderly, but he may or may not have been old.

Whatever Simeon's age, he held fast to God's promise to see God's Anointed One. Simeon fervently believed Israel's covenant God would make good on that promise. God would send His Deliverer.

2:27. The Spirit prompted Simeon to enter the temple complex. For the third time in three verses, Luke stressed the Holy Spirit's activity in this incident in Jesus' life. Behind the scenes, God was orchestrating His unfolding redemptive purpose. The words "temple" probably referred to the court of the women, an outer court of the temple beyond which women could not go. Jesus' parents brought Him there to fulfill the law's requirements. As was customary under the law, they consecrated their firstborn Son to God (see Ex. 13:2,12,15; Num. 3:13; 18:15-16; Deut. 21:15-17).

2:28. Under the Spirit's leading, Simeon approached Joseph and Mary and reached out to receive the child and hold Him in his arms. Two often overlooked and surprising factors were involved in this exchange. First, Joseph and Mary were obviously poor, yet Simeon recognized the baby they held as the Messiah. Second, they allowed a stranger to hold their child. Remarkably, they evidently did not hesitate. As Simeon held the infant Jesus, he praised God. Literally, he "blessed God." Our word "eulogy" comes from the Greek word that is translated by the ESV as "blessed." Customarily, the Jews' prayers of thanksgiving began with praising God and acknowledging His glory. As Simeon held Jesus, he prayed. His prayer is in the form of a beautiful hymn comparable to the finest Old Testament psalms.

2:29. Simeon acknowledged God as his Master. The words "letting your servant depart in peace" are a way of saying "I am now ready to die" (see Gen. 15:15). This is an affirmation that God had kept His promise to Simeon. "Now" emphasizes that Simeon was marking the precise point in time when God had done what He had promised to do. One senses that once Simeon saw Jesus, held the baby in his arms, praised Him, and knew that Jesus was the Savior of the world, Simeon's life was fulfilled. Simeon has been described as a watchman who could leave his assigned post because that for which he had been watching had come.

2:29. "According to thy word - It was promised to him, that he should not die till he had seen the Lord's anointed, Luke 2:26; and now, having seen him, he expects to be immediately dismissed in peace into the eternal world; having a full assurance and enjoyment of the salvation of God. Though Simeon means his death, yet the thing itself is not mentioned; for death has not only lost its sting, but its name also, to those who have, even by faith, seen the Lord's anointed." Adam Clark *Commentary on Luke*.

2:30. Simeon understood that God's salvation was not a goal to be achieved by great effort. His salvation was a Person, the Lord Jesus Christ. As the man of faith looked at Jesus, he knew that his eyes beheld the salvation God had provided. To see Jesus was/is to see salvation.

2:30. "seen thy salvation—Many saw this child, nay, the full-grown "man, Christ Jesus," who never saw in Him "God's Salvation." This estimate of an object of sight, an unconscious, helpless babe, was pure faith. He "beheld His glory" (Joh 1:14). In another view it was prior faith rewarded by present sight." *Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary on Luke*.

2:31. God provided this salvation for all people, not just for the Jews. The humble birth of Jesus illustrates clearly that He came to provide salvation for any who would receive Him. All the people of the world could relate to a baby born in meager surroundings, but not all of them could

have related to one born in wealth. Barriers such as class and race collapse in a stable. All the wealthy and prestigious as well as all of the poor and forgotten people of the world, regardless of infirmities or handicaps, can gather at the stable and identify with the Christ child born there.

2:32. Simeon clarified the inclusiveness of the redemption God made available in Jesus. Jesus is as a “light ... to the Gentiles” (nations) and a “glory” to God’s “people Israel.” Jesus was the light who could dispel the spiritual and moral darkness of the Gentiles. Jesus was also the shining glory to Israel, fulfilling the revelation that already had been given to them. Certainly, one of the appropriate ways to observe Christmas is to praise God in prayer and song for the salvation He has so graciously provided for us in Jesus Christ.

2:33. After Joseph and Mary heard Simeon declare the praises of their Son, they “were amazed.” It was a natural reaction to God’s divine revelation. Simeon specified Jesus’ mission to both Gentiles and Jews, details lacking in the messages Mary and Joseph had received earlier. An angel had visited each of them separately before Jesus’ birth.

2:34-35. Then Simeon made a further pronouncement to Jesus’ mother Mary. Why just Mary? Perhaps Simeon had insight into Joseph’s death (as it is believed) before Jesus would begin His public ministry. Regardless, Simeon’s prophecy may have been troubling and startling to Mary. Her Son would be the source of national division, personal opposition, and her own pain. Jesus was destined to cause the fall and rise of many. This prophecy asserted two opposite reactions to Jesus. Division would result from His life and ministry as some would fall in judgment while others would rise in salvation. Simeon’s prophetic message made it clear that Jesus’ ministry would not be met with wholehearted acceptance from all of those He came to deliver. Some of Jesus’ own people would reject Him. This is made clear at the start of the gospel story, not part of a surprise ending. Jesus would cause division and opposition even as He went about bringing reconciliation, redemption, and salvation.

2:36-38. The immediate shift of focus from Simeon, a male who prophesied, to Anna, the prophetess, fits with Luke’s emphasis on women. The other prophetesses mentioned in the NT are Philip’s daughters (Ac 21:8-9). Anna had been married for seven years and a widow until she was 84. Besides being a prophetess, Anna’s other ministry included devotion to prayer. Since Jerusalem was the Jewish capital, “the redemption of Jerusalem” means the redemption of all the people of Israel.