

Part 8: The Greatest Consolation Prize

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January 2, 2022

Our new sermons series is going to interrupt two temple scenes in the book of Luke. Come February, we are going to see Jesus as a young boy in the temple as Luke begins to show us Jesus preparation for ministry. But today we are going to see the infant Jesus in the temple as Luke concludes the birth narrative in his book.

We will talk more about this in a moment, but the context of these events today is Mary and Joseph are taking Jesus to the temple to present him to the Lord. Which is what any good Jewish family would do with their firstborn. I'm sure that when they did this, the priests eventually took the infant Christ, prayed for him, offered a sacrifice for him, and dedicated him to the Lord. However, what you might recall from what was just read for us is that Luke doesn't include any of those acts of presentation.

That's not because Jesus wasn't presented to the Lord, but more importantly, and in a wonderful twist of events, this isn't a story of the child Jesus being presented to the Lord, this is a story of Jesus the Lord being presented to his people.

What we encounter today is the presentation of what God's faithful followers were waiting for. Something which dwelt in Simeon's heart as "the consolation of Israel." When we think of consolation we might think of consolation prizes and participation trophies. They are little trinkets given meant to boost our spirits, but which are obviously of lesser value than the grand prize.

But here in the consolation of Israel, is the hope for all who feel the burden of brokenness the weariness of waiting, and the sorrow of those who always feel like the joy or peace they search for always escapes them. For those who wonder who Jesus is, here he is presented for us in theological perspective. Today we see Jesus presented as one who consoles those who need motivation for obedience, for salvation and for worship. Life is so hard, we don't need to be reminded of that. But in the person of Jesus Christ, those who are weary, those who are burdened, those who find the tedious nature of this life difficult, is joy which gives us peace and draws us forward. For those who feel enamored by all the glamor of the world, here is a prize so incredibly that it makes everything else pale in significance.

Today Luke is going to present to us four aspects of Jesus which give us hope as Jesus' followers. First we are going to see that **Jesus makes obedience possible**, then in Simeon's song we see **Jesus makes salvation visible**, in verses 33-35 we are going to see that **Jesus divides our hearts**, and lastly in the story of Anna and of Simeon we see **Jesus fulfills our lives**.

Let's begin today by reading **Luke 2:22-24**.

So here we see our first presentation of Jesus in this text: **Jesus makes obedience possible**.

What might seem like just a bit of context here is actually of deep significance for us. First we see that Mary and Joseph were in poverty.

Many of us might think that if we follow Jesus, riches and comfort will follow us, but here Mary, the one who bore the Lord and who was already called by the angel “favored by God,” finds herself under the poverty clause of the Old Testament law. How much you make and how comfortable your worldly amenities are, are of no significance of your standing before the Lord.

To have riches and worldly comfort does not mean that one has Jesus, and to have Jesus does not mean that you will have riches and worldly comfort. Pleasure and provision comes from proximity to Jesus not the rewards of the world.

We see this all the more in what I call the “poverty clause,” which is here mentioned by Luke in verse 24. Part of what Mary and Joseph were waiting on was the time of purification to end. That is for male children, the Law prescribed that the mother and son shall not come into the temple for 33 days after her pregnancy. Moses tells us what would happen next in **Leviticus 12:6-8**.

In order to complete the dedication of the child and to consummate the purification process, a sacrifice was made for atonement. Part of the curse of sin was pain in childbirth. So the blood and the hard work of labor marked people in their sin. Not because sex and childbirth is sinful, but because of the fall every human ever born was born into sin. So God’s law provided a way forward, a sacrifice which cleansed the mother and child.

Generally this sacrifice would be a lamb, a turtle dove and a pigeon. But for those who couldn't afford the lamb, God made a provision. They could offer two turtle doves and two pigeons, two very cheap animals, and they could by that same offering receive the same atonement as those who offered the full lamb.

Mary and Joseph went to the temple to offer sacrifices under this poverty clause because they couldn't afford a lamb.

What's important to see here is that even in the Old Testament law, God made a way for those who did have enough, to still have access to atonement. Where one would desire to come to the Lord for purification, even the Law made a way to bring consolation to those who had none.

But not only do we see Mary and Joseph’s poverty, but we see their obedience to the Law and Jesus’ participation in the Law. What shouldn't be missed upon us is that this is the first place where Luke explicitly quotes the Old Testament.

Luke alluded to the Old Testament many times, but it's only here that he explicitly quotes it. One quote from the Leviticus, and from Exodus. It was not the prophetic joy of Micah, Malachi or Isaiah which Luke draws our attention to, but the explicit quotations of the Old Testament law.

Jesus, who already was God-in-the-flesh, the eternal second person of the Trinity, did not need to be subjected to the law. He was by nature already clean, sinless, radiant, holy. But as his parents obeyed the Law, Jesus himself was placed under the law not for his sake, but for ours.

Jesus, even as an infant, was put under the commandments of God's law so that he could fulfill the law in the place of those he came to save. We will see in the book of Luke that one of Jesus' primary roles as the Messiah was to perfectly obey God's law, and here even at birth, he placed himself under the full obedience of it. The problem which stained every child born of man was disobedience and the

punishment deserved, but here Jesus born of God and man, began the plan of perfect obedience to ransom those who sat under judgement.

Why is this of significance for us today? Because it is by Jesus' perfect obedience that his own parent's poverty offering would be acceptable to the Lord. The author of Hebrews tells us that it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats and turtledoves to remove our sins and make atonement. Which means that the only reason those who could afford a lamb and those who couldn't, would receive the atonement from the Lord is because God allowed the blood of bulls, goats and doves to be a placeholder for the ultimate sacrificial lamb: Jesus Christ.

As Mary and Joseph rejoiced in that they were able to obey the law because of God's generous provision, they had no idea that the reason they received grace to offer a lesser sacrifice was because their own son was going to be the full and final sacrifice for atonement.

Just as the law, weakened as it was, tried to give God's people what they need to obey, Jesus Christ who is the fulfillment of the law gives all who come to him the power they need to obey God.

Because Jesus upheld the law of God perfectly, he paid the impossible price for our disobedience so that obedience might be possible to all by his wonderful provision. The call to Jesus is a call to be saved from the works of the flesh and set towards obedience in the Spirit, and here we see that even when obedience seems difficult, Jesus gives us exactly what we need to obey.

You can imagine the debate Mary and Joseph might have had before they went to Jerusalem. Remember they didn't live in Jerusalem and had to travel to it. Joseph might have said: "Hey Mary, isn't this kid the Messiah? Isn't he the Son of God? Do you really think we still have to do the whole presentation thing? Doesn't he already get a gold star or something?"

But they chose to obey, they not only began Jesus' redemptive substitutionary obedience, they not only received the Lord's provision, but their obedience resulted in amazing praise and encouragement to others.

As we will see in a bit, it just so happened that as Mary and Joseph obeyed, Simeon walked into the temple that day. As Mary and Joseph offered their sacrifices, Anna came up to worship. As Jesus saves us and turns us loose by his provision for obedience we never know the ways in which God will use our seemingly ordinary acts of obedience to accomplish great things in his church.

Let's now turn to one of those fruits in the story of Simeon, and it's here we see our second point this morning: **Jesus Makes Salvation Visible.**

Read with me **Luke 2:25-32.**

In this passage we see Luke's wonderful theme of inversion continue. If you weren't reading closely you might assume that Simeon was a priest. But unlike Zechariah, he is not called a priest, he is just called, "a man in Jerusalem."

We would think that it would be one of the priest of the day who was one faithfully waiting for the consolation of Israel, the one who would so clearly see the Lord's Christ and break out in glorious song. Yet it was not. It was just faithful Simeon.

But here we see the wonderful work of the Holy Spirit to lead men to Jesus. Simeon was righteous, and devout, waiting eagerly for the Lord to lift the hopes of Israel. But more than that he was filled with the Holy Spirit.

Now for those of us today who come to faith in Jesus Christ we are all immediately and abidingly indwelt with the Holy Spirit. But in the time prior to Pentecost the Holy Spirit only abided and came upon people for specific tasks as commissioned by the Lord.

Samson was filled with the Holy Spirit when he slayed the Philistines. The Holy Spirit dwelt upon Elijah when he called down fire from heaven. The Holy Spirit carried men in the Old Testament to great places and to do great things.

But did you notice the gift that the Holy Spirit gave Simeon? It was not the gift we would think we'd want. It was the gift of waiting. The Holy Spirit was dwelling in him with eager anticipation because it was told to Simeon that he would not die until he saw the Lord's Christ.

Every day Simeon would go to the temple and look around eagerly to see if the messiah had come, and every day he'd go home. You'd have to imagine that had an emotional effect on Simeon, yet he didn't lose hope.

One day, he was led by the Holy Spirit into the temple, and he saw what every other person, and all the priests saw in that temple: an impoverished couple ordinarily presenting a firstborn child to the Lord. But he saw it with the eyes of the Holy Spirit when no one else did.

This is how anyone who sees Jesus with saving eyes sees him. With the eyes of the flesh each and every one of us gaze at Jesus and see him only as the world does. But when the Holy Spirit works on our dead hearts, he gives us eyes to see what our sin never could. Carnal eyes do not see, but eyes opened by the Spirit of the Lord behold the spiritual realities of our redemption. It is a miracle to see what we see when the Holy Spirit grants us saving sight.

For those of us who want consolation, for those of us who feel the pain of waiting, of brokenness, of the failing of our flesh, the Holy Spirit has come to console us straight to Jesus.

As the Holy Spirit revealed Jesus to Simeon he broke forth in song: **Luke 2:29-32**.

Here again we see the way in which the Holy Spirit reveals to us Jesus, and the way in which Jesus reveals to us the Father's salvation.

John says in **John 1:18**.

Most of us have a desire to see God, or whatever we might define in our lives as God. The turn of the century marked the rise of the "nones." Not n-u-n's but n-o-n-e-s. None's are those who when asked what religion they follow check the box: none. However our modern era is seeing not an increase in atheism, but in spiritualism.

More and more people are realizing the dark and lonely ends of humanism—this world on its own does not satisfy, cannot save, and will not relent. Therefore to medicate the brokenness of the world they turn to something spiritual, a cocktail of love, good vibes and energy which sustains all things.

This turn is a turn towards nothing less than salvation. But there is no salvation unless we turn to Jesus Christ. We will never see salvation, we will never see the goodness of the loving Father unless we see his salvation in the Son as revealed to us by the Holy Spirit.

And there is great news in this text. Remember what we saw last week with the shepherds: **Luke 2:10**. This savior is good news for all people. What is meant by that? Look at **Luke 2:31-32**.

Simeon, in contrast to the priests and religious officials of his day, knew his Old Testament better than any of them. He knew passages like **Psalms 98:2-3** and **Isaiah 2:2**.

He knew that in an increasingly pluralistic age, his fellow Jews were beginning to wonder if their God was really that glorious. But here it is Jesus Christ who would remind those wondering that their glory was indeed in their God.

But he also knew that for those who sat apart from God's promise, that the Lord's messiah would come as a light revealing to them how they might enjoy the covenant promises of this God who really saves.

Here is the consolation of salvation, all who come to God through Jesus Christ are saved. Apart from this light there is no salvation. Apart from this light there is no seeing of the Father. Apart from this light there is no consolation. But in it, for all who come, is peace, salvation, light and glory.

This message might seem ordinary for us today, but for Mary and Joseph they marveled at this. They marveled not only at the role their son would play, but that God actually desired to save the Gentiles along with Israel.

But Simeon then looked into the marveling eyes of Mary and Joseph, and Luke says he blessed them with a sort of ominous blessing. Read with me **Luke 2:33-35**.

Here we see the kind of salvation that Jesus brings in that **Jesus Divides Our Hearts**.

My wife is healing from shoulder surgery but one of the blessings we had was knowing people who had similar surgeries. Sarah was able to hear from their experiences what she could expect about life post-surgery, rehab, pain, and setbacks.

Preparation is always a blessing, even when preparation seems difficult. Preparation is a consolation even if it's not always what we'd want to hear.

But here, as a result of his Spirit filled song of praise Simeon tells Mary and Joseph, and us today, that a life of following Jesus is a life filled with high and lows. As we will see in the book of Luke Jesus was a polarizing figure. Many flocked to Jesus, many hated Jesus. Many walked joyfully with Jesus until Jesus' claims about lordship and discipleship became uncomfortable for them and then they left.

For some, Jesus is the stumbling block which provokes the anger and hostility of our hearts. For others Jesus is the step which brings us into the saving presence of the Lord. This is the polarizing effect Jesus has in our world.

Simeon alludes to Mary's pain when she would watch her son die for her own sins and it would be as if she were pierced by a sword. Following Jesus is terribly uncomfortable if we are not comfortable with Jesus.

But the purpose of all this division is for the sake of clarity that the thoughts of your heart may be revealed. There will be moments where you might encounter pain in one of three ways. For those who do not know Jesus as your savior, you might hear calls to submit to his Lordship as offensive and distasteful, it pricks your pride in the most sensitive of ways. For others who do submit to Jesus, you might find yourselves opposed by others because of your faith in Jesus and this causes us to feel alone. For others, you may like Mary encounter deep pain and loss while following Jesus which feels like death itself.

It is better that our hearts be revealed in these moments so that we might know what to do with our pain, so that we might better understand our own consolation and the hope of our salvation.

Consider the words of Paul in **2 Corinthians 1:8-10**.

The exposure of the sign of Christ is meant to lead us in the midst of our pain back to the safe refuge of trusting in Jesus and his salvation. If you want to see what is in your heart, gaze upon the sign of Jesus. As C.S. Lewis famously said he is either a liar, a lunatic, or he is Lord. This might sound somber, and it is. But for all whose hearts see Jesus as Lord, there is actually deep joy even in this world.

This is our final point this morning: **Jesus Fulfills Our Lives**.

Read with me **Luke 2:36-38**.

So here we encounter Anna, who was married at a young age, but then left widowed for most of her life. In the midst of her pain and loneliness she wasted nothing but instead gave herself to the service of the Lord and for prayers for her brothers and sisters.

What hope do those of us who are single or perhaps of failing health take from this passage? That even when it seems we have nothing to offer, we can be of service to God and others by praying, fasting and worshipping the Lord in the midst of all of this.

And while she put herself to this task, it just so happened that she walked in on that day when Simeon raised up Jesus and praised him, and Anna too with all the power of the Holy Spirit was stirred with worship anew. She began to praise God and to speak of him to all of those who were also waiting the redemption of Israel.

You see the joy of the birth of Jesus moved Anna to go towards those who were also waiting, also longing for consolation, and to share with them the good news that salvation had come. The gathering of the Lord's people is a gift that sustains our cycle of singing and sighing. Anna came to those who were sighing under the weight of life, and she sang to them the salvation of Jesus. There will be times where you have the joy of singing into the sighs of those around you here in church, and there will be times

when it is yours sighs that need the song of others but the Holy Spirit so works in the gospel of Jesus that we help each other give joyful thanks to God.

More so, look back at Simeon's response to seeing Jesus: **Luke 2:29**.

By reading Simeon's words here we generally assume Simeon is old. But Luke doesn't tell us that. He tells us Zechariah and Elizabeth are old. He tells us that Anna is old. But the age of Simeon is not mentioned to us.

But what is mentioned is that when he saw the salvation of the Lord in Jesus Christ, nothing else mattered to him. He had peace.

He didn't need to see the end of the story. He didn't need to see all of the problems solved before his eyes. He didn't need to see Jesus' perfect obedience, he didn't need to witness water turned to wine, a cross turned to an empty tomb, or resurrected hand pierced by iron nails. He knew, when he saw Jesus for the first time that there was no longer any doubt.

One commentator said of Simeon's hope: "He speaks like one for whom the grave has lost its terrors and the world its charm."

This text highlights those waiting for purification, waiting for a savior, waiting for a purpose, and the only way we will endure the painful valleys of this world is when we realize that we lose nothing when we gain Jesus.

There's a country song whose chorus goes, "Everybody wants to go to heaven, but nobody wants to go now." How untrue that was for Simeon, but how subtly true that might be in our own hearts.

How often do we burden ourselves with the pain of waiting for a different salvation: we want problems solved, and then we can have peace, we want a spouse and then we can rejoice in Jesus, we want to summit that mountain peak, watch that graduation, or fund that retirement account and then we can worship. We want something else and then we can depart in peace.

But this salvation which reveals itself in Jesus Christ comes to us with such great joy that we can look at all the vices and valleys of this world and say: "Lord now I can die in peace."

We don't know when Simeon died! We don't know if he lived another day or another decade but what we do know is that however long he lived his final and enduring fulfillment in life was that he was saved by the light of the glory of God.

The consolation of life in this broken world is that to have Christ is to have everything. It consumes us even when it seems we have nothing.

In closing I want to read the words of Paul in **Philippians 3:8-10**.