



Christmas Special

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Simeon and Anna - Luke 2:22-39

- In keeping with our tradition, we will be taking a break from our regular series in Isaiah and look instead at a topic related to Christmas.
- For our time together this morning I would like for us to look at a passage that describes an event just *subsequent* to the birth of Christ – a passage that we don't hear cited all that often.
- *Specifically* we are going to be looking at an account given in the book of Luke of two lesser known individuals, Simeon and Anna, and their reaction to the newborn Christ child.

How We Will Approach this Text

- I will begin by reading the entire text
- I will then give some background on why Mary and Joseph were bringing Jesus to the temple where they encountered Simeon and Anna.
- I will then briefly introduce our two main characters: Simeon and Anna
- After that, the *bulk* of the lesson will focus on the main ideas presented to us by Simeon and Anna – in *categorical* rather than *verse by verse* order.

Simeon and Anna - Luke 2:22-39

Jesus' Presentation at the Temple

2:22 Now when the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, Joseph and Mary brought Jesus up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ²³ (just as it is written in the law of the Lord [in Exodus 13:2], "Every firstborn male will be set apart to the Lord"), ²⁴ and to offer a sacrifice according to what is specified in the law of the Lord, a pair of doves or two young pigeons.

Simeon and Anna - Luke 2:22-39

Simeon Introduced

2:25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon who was righteous and devout, looking for the restoration of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.

26 It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

Simeon and Anna - Luke 2:22-39

Simeon's Song of Praise

2:27 So Simeon, directed by the Spirit, came into the temple courts, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what was customary according to the law, ²⁸ Simeon took him in his arms and blessed God, saying, ²⁹ "Now, according to your word, Sovereign Lord, permit your servant to depart in peace. ³⁰ For my eyes have seen your salvation ³¹ that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples: ³² a light, for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."

Simeon and Anna - Luke 2:22-39

Simeon's Interaction With Mary and Joseph

2:33 So the child's father and mother were amazed at what was said about him. ³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, "Listen carefully: This child is destined to be the cause of the falling and rising of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be rejected. ³⁵ Indeed, as a result of him the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul as well!"

Simeon and Anna - Luke 2:22-39

The Testimony of Anna

2:36 There was also a prophetess, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old, having been married to her husband for seven years until his death. ³⁷ She had lived as a widow since then for eighty-four years. She never left the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. ³⁸ At that moment, she came up to them and began to give thanks to God and to speak about the child to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem. ³⁹ So when Joseph and Mary had performed everything according to the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth.

Background - Why Mary and Joseph Brought Jesus to the Temple

- The Apostle Paul tells us in Galatians 4:4 that Jesus “*born under the law*”, meaning that he and his parents were Jews and were under obligation to obey the Law of Moses.
- And, of course, Jesus *himself* kept the Law *perfectly* throughout his entire life.
- In this passage we see Jesus’ *parents* faithfully carrying out all the requirements of the law for Jesus as a Jewish boy even when Jesus was too young to actively do these things himself.

Background - Why Mary and Joseph Brought Jesus to the Temple

- Mary and Joseph went to the temple in Jerusalem to do **two things** – one had to do with **Mary**, the other had to do with **Jesus**:
 - **Mary**, as a Jewish woman:
 - Was required to go through a **purification ceremony forty days after giving birth** to a male child. (Lev 12:1-4)
 - Had they been able to afford it, Mary and Joseph would have been required to bring “*a one-year-old lamb for a burnt offering and a young pigeon or turtledove for a sin offering*” (Lev 12:6)
 - Those who could not **afford** a lamb could bring “*two turtledoves or two young pigeons*” instead (Lev 12:8)
 - Since this is what Mary and Joseph brought (Luke 2:24), it is an indication that they were too poor to afford a lamb.

Background - Why Mary and Joseph Brought Jesus to the Temple

- Because Jesus was a firstborn son:
 - His parents were required to “buy him back” from God or “redeem” him by making a payment of five shekels of silver – about 20 days wages (Ex 13:1, 2, 11–15; Num 3:11–13, 41, 44, 45, 47–51; 18:16)
 - The reason for this law:
 - When God struck down all the firstborn in Egypt, he saved the firstborn of Israel.
 - Therefore, from that time on, God claimed a right to all Jewish firstborn sons and required all Jewish parents to *redeem* them at the time of their birth.

Background - Why Mary and Joseph Brought Jesus to the Temple

- So that's our background, Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem in order to meet the requirements of the Law.
- While they were there, the Spirit of God sovereignly arranged for them to meet two individuals who prior to this time, as far as we know, were total strangers to them:
 - A *presumably* older man named "*Simeon*"
 - An "*very old*" woman named "*Anna*"
- We know *very little* about these two individuals except what is said about them in this text.

Introducing Simeon

- The passage does not state that Simeon held any particular office; for example, that of priest.
- Verse 25 describes Simeon as “*righteous and devout.*”
- This suggests that his behavior both with respect to men (he was “*righteous*”) and God (he was “*devout*”) had Lord’s approval.
- Furthermore, we are told that Simeon was “*looking for the restoration of Israel.*”

Introducing Simeon

- Simeon was, no doubt, familiar with the many prophecies that *we* have seen in the book of Isaiah which tell of a coming Messianic Age (Isaiah 7:14; 9:1–7; 11:1–10; 40:1–11; 49:8–13; 51:1–6, 12–16; 52:13–55:13; 60:1–3; 61; 66:13).
- Verse 26 tells us that the Holy Spirit had *revealed* to Simeon that he would not die before he had seen the “*Lord’s Christ*” – the Messiah who the LORD had promised throughout the Old Testament would be coming. (Psalm 2:2; 45:7; 110:1; Isaiah 61:1 etc.)
- So this was a moment that Simeon had been looking forward to!

Introducing Anna

- Anna is described in verse 36 as “*a prophetess*”
- There are only *five* other prophetesses mentioned in the Old Testament:
 - “*Miriam*” (Exodus 15:20)
 - “*Deborah*” (Judges 4:4)
 - “*Huldah*” (2 Kings 22:14, 2 Chronicles 34:22)
 - “*Noadiah*” (Nehemiah 6:14)
 - An unnamed prophetess (probably Isaiah’s wife) (Isaiah 8:3)
- The only prophetesses mentioned in the New Testament were the daughters of Philip (Acts 21:9) – and the *false* prophetess “*Jezebel*” mentioned in Revelation 2:20.

Introducing Anna

- A “*prophet*” or “*prophetess*” was someone who received direct revelation from God which was then communicated to others.
- Furthermore, we are told that Anna was “*the daughter of Phanel, of the tribe of Asher*” –
 - The Jews kept careful genealogical records at this time
 - No other information is given in the Bible concerning her father, “*Phanel*”, though his mention here **may** indicate that he was a person of note.
- “*She was very old, having been married to her husband for seven years until his death. She had lived as a widow since then for eighty-four years.*”
 - If she married at age 15
 - Was married 7 years
 - Lived as a widow for 84 years
 - Then she would have been 106 years old
 - That’s definitely “**very old**”!

Introducing Anna

- It says that “*she never left the temple*” – **probably** not meant to be taken literally – but much like our current idiom, where we say someone is there every time the church doors are open.
- It describes her as “*worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day*” – So, like Simeon, Anna was a **devout** believing Jew.
- Having set up the background and introduced our characters, I would now like to focus on the **key ideas** that we find in the prophecies given by Simeon and Anna and think about their implications for us.
- If I were going to put a **title** on what these two had to say, I would title it: **Jesus Brings Peace through a Sword.**
- So, the **two** major ideas taught concerning Jesus are:
 - Jesus Brings **Peace**
 - But Jesus is a **Divider** – He Brings a **Sword**

Jesus Brings Peace

- First of all, Jesus brings *Peace*.
- Peace involves the kind of ideas that we *normally* associate with Christmas: *“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among people with whom he is pleased!”* (Luke 2:14)
- In verses 29-32, Simeon praises God, his *“Sovereign Lord”* [literally, *“Master”*], that he can now die in *“peace”* because in Jesus he sees God’s provision of *“salvation”* for *“all people”*:
 - *“a light, for revelation to the Gentiles”* – true knowledge of God for the nations who, prior to this time, had been in darkness *“having no hope and without God in the world”* (Ephesians 2:12)
 - *“and for glory to your people Israel”* – Christ was Israel’s ultimate glory for he was brought forth *from* them (according to his human nature – Romans 9:5) and was the *fulfillment* of all that had been promised *to* them.

Jesus Brings Peace

- In verse 38 Anna describes Jesus as the “*redemption of Jerusalem*”.
- “*Redemption*” is the price that Jesus paid with his blood to purchase his people’s salvation.
- So we see in these prophecies many of the ideas that we *normally* sing about and associate with Christmas:
 - Peace
 - Salvation
 - Light
 - Glory
- Verse 33 tells us that as Mary and Joseph listened to these things, “*were amazed at what was said about [Jesus]*”

Jesus is a Divider – He Brings a Sword

- But Jesus doesn't *just* bring Peace – He is a *Divider* – He Brings a *Sword*!
- In verses 34-35, Simeon describes Jesus in ways that we *don't* normally associate with Christmas:
 - *Listen carefully: This child is destined to be the cause of the falling and rising of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be rejected. Indeed, as a result of him the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul as well!* (Luke 2:34-35)
- Here we see Jesus as:
 - A divider
 - Someone who comes to pick a fight
 - Someone who is rejected
 - Someone who shows people who they really are – and it's not pretty
 - Someone who brings pain – a sword that pierces the soul

Jesus is a Divider – He Brings a Sword

- These are *not* descriptions that we *usually* associate with the babe in a manger that we sing about at Christmas time!
- At first these ideas seem like a downer. And in one sense they are, perhaps that is why we don't talk about them much at Christmas.
- But doesn't Jesus come to bring peace on earth?
- Of course he does! But verses 34-35 it tells us *how* he brings peace on earth.
- How does a *surgeon* bring peace to your *body* when it has a tumor in it?
- The surgeon spills your blood.
- The surgeon cuts you wide open.
- That is the only way for your body to have peace!

Jesus is a Divider – He Brings a Sword

- Do you remember in Matthew 10:34 where Jesus says: “*Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have **not** come to bring **peace** but a **sword!**”*?”
- And yet later he also says, “***Peace** I leave with you; **my peace** I give to you*” (John 14:27)
- Which is it?
- It’s **both!**
- As we look at verses 34-35 more closely, we see that Jesus is a divider in **two** ways:
 - Jesus divides people **from** people.
 - Jesus causes conflicts **within** people

Jesus Divides People From People

- *Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, “Listen carefully: This child is destined to be the **cause** of the **falling and rising** of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be **rejected**.” (Luke 2:35)*
- What Simeon is saying here is that Jesus came to **polarize** people.
 - He either causes you to “rise” or he causes you to “fall”.
 - The word “**cause**” here applies to **both** groups: Jesus will cause everybody to either rise or fall – there is no in between.
 - He comes to push you **up** or push you **down**.
 - How can this be?
 - Because Jesus is **divisive**. Simeon predicts this and the Bible talks about it.

Jesus Divides People From People

- *How* does Jesus polarize people?
- By his *claims*, for one thing.
- Jesus claims to be “*King of Kings and Lord of Lords*” (1Tim 6:15; Rev 19:16)
- You cannot be neutral about that. You can either *accept* that or *fight against it*.
- If someone comes up to you and says, “I own you; you belong to me”.
- You can’t be casual about that! You can’t be neutral about that person. You either have to:
 - *Reject* that person and *fight* that person off
 - Or you have to *comply*; you have to *submit* to that person.

Jesus Divides People *From* People

- So if Simeon is right and Jesus came to *divide* people, why is it that most people don't seem to be "*rising*" or "*falling*"?
- There are plenty of people who *hate* Jesus and at least they're *consistent*.
- On the other hand, there are people who have given *everything* over to Jesus and they have decided that Jesus is the supreme thing in their life.
- But *most* people are *neither*. Most people are moderately happy, moderately religious – they're just moderate.
- The only way to account for these people is to understand that they don't know who the *real* Jesus is.
- Their Jesus is a *fabrication*; their Jesus is an *idol*.

Jesus Divides People *From* People

- Who is *your* Jesus?
- Is your Jesus Christ the one who says I did not come to bring peace on earth but a sword?
- Is your Jesus the one who *polarizes*?
- Is your Jesus the one that causes people to rise or fall but allows no one in between?

Jesus Divides People From People

- Jesus is either:
 - The *supreme thing* in your life so that there is not a thing in your life that is *not* in submission to him – *the King of Kings and Lord of Lords*
 - *Or* you *hate* Jesus.
- There is no in between.
- *This child is destined to be the cause of the falling and rising of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be rejected. (Luke 2:35)*
- *If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother, and wife and children, and brothers and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. (Luke 14:26)*

Jesus Causes Conflict Within the Heart

- Jesus not only causes conflicts *between* people, but he also causes conflict *within* the individual human heart.
- Simeon says, “*the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed*”
- This means Jesus came to show people who they really are – and it isn’t pretty.
- Throughout his earthly ministry, Jesus exposed people for who they really were.
- And he still does this today through the gospel and through his Word:
- *For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any double-edged sword, piercing even to the point of dividing soul from spirit, and joints from marrow; it is able to judge the desires and thoughts of the heart. And no creature is hidden from God, but everything is naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must render an account.* (Hebrews 4:12-13)
- If you come to Jesus, he **will** expose your sin.

Jesus Causes Conflict Within the Heart

- What do you do when Jesus exposes the sin in your heart?
- When Jesus exposes sin in our heart through his gospel or his word:
 - God's peace can only come through one thing: *repentance*.
 - Repentance is like antiseptic.
 - You pour antiseptic onto a wound and at first it always *stings*, but it *heals*.
 - That is *exactly* the way repentance works.
 - And there is no way to get *any* of that peace without going through that *pain*.
- The great thing about the gospel is that the gospel shows that *anybody* can come to God no matter what your record is.

Jesus Causes Conflict Within the Heart

- Christianity is a way to find God for people who *aren't* good.
- Through Christ *anybody* can find God.
- Because Jesus Christ lived a perfect life and died a perfect death, when you believe in Jesus God now treats you, as if:
 - You have done everything Jesus has done
 - You have suffered everything Jesus has suffered.
- That means when you believe in Christ, you are adopted, *not* on the basis of *your* record, but on the basis of *his* record.
- You're adopted into his family and treated as if you accomplished everything he has accomplished.
- That's the gospel!

Jesus Causes Conflict Within the Heart

- Somebody might say, “Well, that’s too easy”.
- But the only way to get peace is through the pain of repentance.
- What is repentance?
- To admit that you have done something wrong?
- Yes, but it’s more than that. It is to admit:
 - That you have a selfish sinful heart and you can’t change it.
 - Therefore you need both forgiveness *and* the power to change.
 - And that your *only hope* is through the sheer mercy of God.
- Repentance is hard. Repentance is painful, repentance is difficult.
- But it’s the *only* way to get peace.

Jesus Causes Conflict Within the Heart

- And repentance isn't *just* for unbelievers. Even as *believers*, we need to go before God and confess our sin:
 - *But if we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous, forgiving us our sins and cleansing us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar and his word is not in us. (My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin.) But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous One. (1 John 1:9-2:1)*
- So again:
 - Jesus divides people from people.
 - Jesus causes conflicts within people

Jesus Causes Conflict Within the Heart

- In the second half of verse 35 we see one more example of how Jesus causes conflicts *within* the heart when Simeon says to Mary, “*a sword will pierce your own soul as well!*”.
- Simeon is predicting that Mary *herself* is going to have a lot of pain in her life.
- While this is *specifically* talking about Mary and the suffering *she* experienced as the mother of Jesus was unique, the scriptures teach that *all* those who love Jesus and stand by him, will suffer because of their association with him just like Mary did.

Jesus Causes Conflict Within the Heart

- Jesus says: “*Whoever does not **take up his cross and follow me** is not worthy of me.*” (Matthew 10:38)
- Philippians 1:29 tells us: “*It has been granted to you not only to believe in Christ but also to **suffer for him***”
- So in that sense, as a follower of Christ, a sword will pass through **your** heart as well.
- J.C. Ryle the famous Anglican bishop of the late nineteenth century said, “*When a person becomes a Christian a new peace comes into your life, but at the same time a new fight comes into your life*”.

Conclusion

- So what do we learn from all this?
- As we listen to Simeon telling Mary, “*This child is destined to be the cause of the falling and rising of many in Israel... and a sword will pierce your own soul as well!*” it reminds us that as Christians we’re to **expect** trouble.
- We **expect** conflict as the way to get to peace.
- We see it in **Jesus**.
- The way **Jesus** brought peace is that he went to the **cross**.
- We know therefore that conflicts are **inevitable** in the Christian life.

Conclusion

- And we also know there is a way to find peace.
- Christians have to realize that sufferings and conflicts and difficulties and temptations - these things are going to come.
- It doesn't mean they don't hurt.
- It doesn't mean they don't make us sad, but we don't let it get to us.
- We're not *shocked* that they're happening – *not really*.
- We're distressed, but we're not distressed that we're distressed.
- We're surprised, but we're not surprised that we're surprised.
- We know these things are going to happen!

Conclusion

- The last thing we learn is that there is a coming Glory.
- Where did Simeon get *his* peace? He says, *“...permit your servant to depart in **peace**. For my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples: a light, for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.”*
- And so, like Simeon, we **look ahead**.
- **That’s** where we get our peace.
- We see that Jesus Christ was humbled and became poor, he became a baby.
- He humbled himself so that he would be exalted.
- Christians know the same thing.

Conclusion

- When Simeon said to Mary, “*a sword will pierce your own soul*”, what if Mary had said, “I don’t *want* a sword through my soul”?
- What if *Jesus* had said, I don’t want a sword in *my* soul?
- *Then* where would you be? Where would *I* be?
- So don’t shrink back. Follow them. Follow *him* to peace.

Next Time

I plan to look at “The Absurdity of Idolatry”
in Isaiah 44:6-23