1-8-23

Luke 2:21-38 (2)

Last Lord’s Day, we began our study of this passage and considered how Luke was interested in showing how Jesus, although the divine Son of God, was born a human-being and born under the Law given through Moses. As we are told in Galatians 4, 4 and 5, “*God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law.*”

As an interesting side note, it was the chosen people of Israel who were under the Law. The Law was part of the Mosaic covenant given to this one nation; this one people group. The Law was a blessing to them because through it, they had a revealed knowledge of God that no one else had. Although none could maintain all the Law required, they could do their best to live out the Law to show their faith in God. So it was still by faith they were saved, but it was under the weight of the Law. The gentiles were simply under the curse of sin and death.

As we read in the speech of Simeon, Jesus was also the salvation of the Gentiles. He understood that the Old Testament proclaimed that in Abraham, all the nations would be blessed.

So, although Jesus was God, He submitted to being born in the flesh and required to keep the whole Law and keep it perfectly. This serves as a warning for us: There are some false teachers who are claiming that Jesus broke the Law out of love for us. While that sounds good to us in human terms, it is impossible. If Jesus had broken any of the covenant, He would no longer have been perfect, and He would have not been a perfect sacrifice for out sins. We would still be condemned to hell.

As an infant, Jesus received the covenant sign of circumcision. This is something He had chosen to submit to in eternity past. In obedience to God, Joseph and Mary named Him Jesus. God had chosen this name and conveyed it through the angel; and it contains the ideas of salvation and deliverance.

In fulfillment of the Law, Mary offered the necessary sacrifice for purification 40 days after she had given birth to Jesus. Verse 23 recalls what the Law says in Leviticus 12 with, “*Every firstborn male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord*” Notice how the emphasis is on the first-born male of the mother and not the father. This is an echo and conformation of Genesis 3:15 where the LORD said that it would be the seed of the woman who would crush the head of satan.

Also, in accordance with the Law, a ransom was paid for Jesus. Because He was the firstborn male who opened the womb of Mary, He was claimed by God to be set apart for service to Him. According to the Law, because the tribe of Levi were all that was needed to dedicate their lives to the service of the Lord, the other firstborn sons were redeemed or ransomed by the payment of five shekels. Once more, the Law was followed, and Jesus was redeemed.

But, of course, Jesus was the ultimate redeemer. Jesus was unsurpassed in the dedication of His life to the LORD. He not only followed the Law; He was the fulfillment of the Law. His life and His sacrifice freed His people Israel from bondage to the Law; and also freed the Gentiles from bondage to sin and death. Joseph and Mary may have paid the ransom price of five shekels for Jesus; but Jesus paid the ransom price for their freedom from sin and guilt, so that they could live forever before God.

While the family is in the temple following the prescriptions of the Law, the man Simeon enters. While Simeon does speak some prophecy, we are not told that this man was a prophet. We are told that the Holy Spirit was upon him and we are told that the Holy Spirit has let him know some things for himself, but there is really no indication that he had been a prophet up to this point. We simply don’t know.

When we read the Bible, God is allowing us to have the full impact of what is happening. The last prophet to speak had been Malachi; there had been no prophetic word from God for the next 400 years. We get to read quickly about how this silence was broken. Zacharias received a word from God, and some of the priests knew about it. He then broke forth in prophecy at the birth of John the Baptist, yet it was only to a few local people in the hill country of Judea.

His wife , Elizabeth, was actually the first to speak prophecy, although it was only to Mary. Mary and Joseph received visits from angels who brought good news and instructions. Angelic hosts appeared to a group of shepherds, who found the Christ child and told others in the vicinity of Bethlehem. From the pregnancy of Elizabeth to the birth of Jesus was about 15 months. Now our account is 40 days later and we meet Simeon who prophesied and Anna who was know as a prophetess.

Again, we get the full impact. After 400 years of silence, God again speaks to His people and gives a clear revelation of Himself. No longer in the veiled Law, but in the incarnate Son of God. But for the people who lived at the time, these were events that were spread over almost a year and a half; they were spread geographically from Bethlehem to Jerusalem to Nazareth; and they were really only revealed to small groups of people. This is God, impacting all of life and eternity, quietly.

We know nothing of Simeon other than what is written here in Luke. He was righteous: he was known by the people for doing the right thing. He was devout: he took seriously the commands of God and they ruled his life. The Holy Spirit was upon him. Notice that word: upon. This is a huge and gracious difference between those before Jesus and we who are disciples of Jesus now.

The Holy Spirit would speak through His prophets. He would come upon them; they would be carried along by Him. But He would come and go as He saw fit. We read of king Saul who had the Holy Spirit bestowed upon him, but due to his disobedience to God, the Holy Spirit was taken from him. King David pleaded with the Lord, after his sin with Bathsheba and Uriah, in Psalm 51:11, “*do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.*” He knew he was in danger of losing Him.

For us now, when we accept Christ as our Lord and Saviour, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell within us, not just upon us; and He will never leave us. He is our guarantee of eternal life with God. Once we come to God through Jesus, we are saved and nothing will change it.

The thing is that “*God is not mocked*”. He knows our heart, so He knows whether or not we have truly accepted Christ as Saviour. It’s not like we can pretend to turn to Jesus so we get the Holy Spirit; we don’t say we accept Christ and then do as we wish. God will not bestow His indwelling Holy Spirit on someone who hasn’t turned to Christ.

Having said that, we who are Christians and have received the Holy Spirit must exert ourselves so that we don’t grieve Him or resist Him. If we continue to grieve Him, He won’t leave us, but He will cease to lead us and be active in our lives. We will face the troubles of this world without help and comfort and we will enter heaven with no treasure stored there waiting for us.

There were many in Judea who had turned from God and simply tried to work within the confines of the Roman government. They had turned from God to the world. There were many who had turned to violence and rebellion against the Roman government. These were ones who sought political salvation and these were the ones who brought about the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

Then there was God’s remnant. These were the ones like Simeon, who were looking for the consolation of Israel. These remained faithful in doing the work of serving the Lord in whatever capacity they could, while waiting for the Lord to deliver on His promises. They believed God; they held to their faith that God would deliver.

The world is the same now. There are so many who have simply turned from God and seek to live according to the world. There are those who look to the government to fix everything. This will not work; the government is made of people and people will fail; even those who try to do right. Be sure that as a Christian, you are among God’s remnant. Be faithful in doing the work God gives to you to do while patiently waiting for the return of our King Jesus.

Simeon had a special promise from God, in one way, just for himself. But in another way, it was for all of us. Simeon getting to see Jesus was conformation that He was indeed the Messiah; He was the fulfillment of prophecy given by God. It is also encouragement. As Simeon patiently waited and was rewarded, we too must patiently wait and we will be rewarded.

After centuries of promises in the Old Testament, Simeon got to see the promised Messiah; he got to see Jesus. Notice that he wasn’t afraid of death; it was welcome for him. He had labored hard in his life in worship of God and now came his rest. A picture for us. We work for the Kingdom of God. It is not slavish labor; it is not without reward; in fact, the yoke of Christ is easy. But we still look forward to that time of rest in God when our work on earth is done. How powerful and wonderful God is. He has turned the wages of sin into the gateway to glory; He has made death the way to eternal life.

Simeon got to hold God in his arms. He blessed God, which means he praised Him. He prays according to God’s will: God had promised to release him from service once he saw the Christ, now he joyfully and submissively says God will do it.

Verse 30 needs to be looked at closely. *For my eyes have seen Your salvation*. He doesn’t say that he has seen the One who will bring salvation. He actually sees God’s salvation. Jesus doesn’t simply bring salvation; He is salvation. Salvation only comes through Him and by Him because He is salvation. Jesus is God the Son incarnate; He is the only begotten Son of God the Father. He is the embodiment of salvation. We must believe on Him, not on what He can do. Our faith must be in Jesus, not in what we have read or heard about Him. He is salvation.

Simeon had gone beyond the prejudice that had overwhelmed most of the people of Israel. Too many has ignored God’s desire that they would spread His name to all peoples. They had come to despise all others; but Simeon remembered God’s promise to Abraham and he understood that Israel was supposed to evangelize the world.

So he extols God for bringing Jesus to the world for all peoples. He quotes prophecy about Jesus being a light reveling God to the Gentiles; he goes so far as mentioning the Gentiles before the Jews. Such was the righteousness of Simeon. But it is still special for Israel. As God’s chosen people, this Saviour comes from them and is their glory.

Joseph and Mary are once again amazed at what was being said about this child; and who can blame them? How could they understand all that was happening and how could they begin to fathom that they were the ones chosen by God to bring the Messiah into the world? Plus, they would have only had a dim view of what the Old Testament revealed about the Christ; they were probably looking for a political leader.

Now Simeon prays for them and utters prophecy. He tells the new parents that their Son is “*appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel.*” On the surface, this sounds political or even social, but it’s not; it’s spiritual. The word translated “rise” here is translated everywhere else in the New Testament as “resurrection”. The word for “fall” has a couple connotations, so here is what we end up with.

Because of Jesus, many in Israel will fall – as in they will humble themselves to accept Him as the Christ. They will fall from pride and humble themselves. These will then also partake in the resurrection to eternal life. There are others however, who will simply fall, they will not accept Jesus and will fall from grace, not receiving eternal life as those who do accept Christ and attain to the resurrection.

Jesus is a sign to be opposed. In the same way that Israel rejected their God, time and again, they will reject Jesus. This will be a sign to them that He is God. Jesus is a sign that points to God, but as we see happens throughout the rest of the gospel accounts, He is constantly opposed. He still is today.

The sword Simeon mentions is a long sword, not the typical short sword of the Roman soldier. The verb “pierce” indicates a continual action, not just a quick once and done. Mary agonized over her Son; partly because she did not understand. At one point she was afraid He has lost His senses; at others, she feared He would fall foul of the Roman authorities.

But mostly, she stood at the cross and watched her beloved Son be crucified; She saw His agony, she saw what they did to Him. Keep in mind that she gave birth to Him and raised Him; He was her Son and she was His mom. Surely her soul was pierced as she watched Him hang from the tree.

In the end, the thoughts of many are revealed. The Gospel is divisive. People will make their stance known about the Christ, given enough time. And the two groups cannot share in fellowship. Light has nothing to do with darkness. Those against Jesus want nothing to do with us. While we try to share the Gospel with unbelievers, we cannot come too close to them lest we are tempted by them and become stained by their sin.

The prophetess Anna was led by the Lord to come to see the Christ child at just the right moment. Either Anna stayed in one of the rooms available at the temple or she spent all her waking hours there. There is a lesson there for us in how she served the Lord; in prayer and in fasting. We don’t always think of these as being ways to serve the Lord, but when done in faith, that is exactly what they do. If you are looking for a way to do the Lord’s work, don’t neglect prayer. He inhabits the praises of His people.

Jesus was born; the fulfillment of the Law; the fulfillment of much of God’s prophecy; and the fulfillment of much of God’s promise. He was born under the Law in order to save us all from eternal death. He paid the price for our soul, so let us be about the work God has ordained for us from before the beginning of time; all the while, waiting patiently for the return of our King.

Prayer

One of the reasons we look forward to eternity with You Lord, is that we will be able to give You never ending thanks for what You have done. Another is that we will be able to eternally engage in the work of serving You; but serving You in sinless perfection and without the shame of sin or the drudgery of the futility of work in this life.

How wonderful it will be, to live in a new heavens and new earth, in an even better relationship with You than we could have had in the Garden of Eden. It will be a place of perfection and sin will no longer have any effect on us; all this due to the will of the Father, the work of the Son, and the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Please give us the strength we need now, to continue working in this life; and the perseverance we need now to wait for Your glorious return.

It is in the name of our King Jesus we pray

Amen