

## Encounters at the Temple

*Luke 2:22-38; December 18, 2016*

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Even in spite of the snow yesterday, last night our staff gathered to do a Christmas Party together and we had a blast (show picture). We really do enjoy not only working together but hanging together as well. Good food, fun and games. One of the games we played was called, “How well do you know your elders?” All I’ve got to say is that I know my elders even better now as a result of that game. Some of you know this about me, but I love the weather, particularly winter weather (show picture). My fascination with winter weather, especially snow, began at an early age and I have numerous memories etched in my mind that I play over and over in my head. Included in those memories are a number of disappointments as well. Can anyone else relate? Has a meteorologist ever let you down? Looking back on it now, I should’ve had more realistic expectations since I grew up in central North Carolina, not exactly the winter capital of the world. You see, everything had to go perfect for us to get a decent snow storm down there (and by decent, 3-5” was a big storm for us and that might keep the kids out of school for a week). During winter time, I would watch “The Weather Channel” just to see if snow made it in the 7 day forecast, and if it did, my hopes began to soar. As the forecast continued the hope of snow, my excitement would grow by the day and on the day that it was actually supposed to snow, my parents knew exactly where they could find me: positioned right in front of a window waiting for the snow to start. I would watch and stare for hours, squinting and looking for that first flake to fall. And then when I finally saw that first flake (I mean, the times when it actually snowed and didn’t rain and disappoint me), I’d go crazy and everyone in the house would know it was snowing.

**Transition:** Well, our passage today isn’t about the weather, but it is about two people, Simeon and Anna, who longed to see a promise fulfilled, not the promise of snow, but God’s promise of a Messiah. Similar to how I watched for hours to see that first flake, they watched and waited with eager expectation and anticipation to see the coming Christ, and they saw him. Can you imagine what it was like for them to see the fulfillment of the one whom God had promised from the very beginning? As we read and learn from their encounter with Jesus at the temple, the main point is going to be clear. We should all...

**The Point:** Embrace Jesus as God’s gift of redemption for all people.

### **Read Luke 2:22-38**

This passage teaches us about Jesus through the testimony of two prophets at the temple. If we are going to embrace Jesus, we’ve got to understand the following three truths about him:

### **I. Jesus is God’s Gift of Redemption for Israel (22-30, 36-38)**

#### **The Setting: Mary, Joseph and Jesus at the Temple (22-24).**

- In these opening verses, Luke summarizes the OT ceremonies that have led Mary and

Joseph to bring Jesus to the temple.

- Purification (Lev. 12:2-4, 6).
  - ◆ Mary would've been unclean for 40 days after the birth of Jesus and was prohibited from coming to the temple during this period. But after these 40 days were over, she was to come to the temple and offer a sacrifice to the Lord. The suggested sacrifice was a lamb for a burnt offering and a pigeon or turtledove for a sin offering. But, if you couldn't afford a lamb, the Law says that you could bring two turtledoves or two pigeons instead (Lev. 12:8). Luke 2:24 makes it clear that Joseph and Mary brought the offering of the poor, specifically identifying Jesus with the very people whom he came to save (Luke 4:18-19).
  - ◆ Ironically, Jesus is the ultimate sacrifice that will fulfill and replace the sacrifices that Mary and Joseph had to offer.
- Presentation and Dedication of the Firstborn (Exod 13:2, 12, 15; 1 Sam. 1-2).
  - ◆ The Law said the firstborn male was to be presented and consecrated to the Lord.
- The point of this section is to present Jesus' parents as pious, law-abiding Jews. So it's Mary and Joseph's obedience to the Lord that brings them to the temple and sets the context for Simeon and Anna to encounter Jesus.

### **Encounter #1: Simeon, a Prophet (25-30)**

- It's interesting what Luke tells us about Simeon. He doesn't mention his vocation or age, but simply that he was a "righteous" and "devout" man in Jerusalem. He was an exemplary saint who just longed for the "consolation of Israel." In other words, he really believed that God's promise of comfort and salvation for Israel would come to pass (cf. Isa 40:1; 49:13; 51:3). God really would do what he said he'd do. He believed God.
- Additionally, the Holy Spirit was upon him.
  - The Spirit revealed to Simeon that he would see the "Christ," the "messiah," before he died.
  - So, as Mary and Joseph set off for the temple in obedience to the Lord, the Spirit was at work in Simeon's life to orchestrate their crossing of paths. This was no accident. God was completely responsible for this meeting. Simeon meets Jesus and takes him up in his arms and then erupts in song.
- Simeon testifies concerning Jesus
  - What follows in 29-32 is Simeon erupting into a hymn of prophetic praise to God as a result of seeing the Christ, the fulfillment of God's word.
  - He can now die in peace, because the anticipated event has come. He has peace because God's work has come to fulfillment. Now God can do with him as he wishes.
  - He praises the faithfulness of God in keeping his word (in the OT and personally through the Spirit).
    - ◆ *Application:* this should bring comfort and assurance to all of us as well. God will keep his word. You can trust him. You can stake your life on God's word.
  - Simeon is a representative for all of Israel. He has seen God's salvation and this salvation is "glory" to the people of Israel. Jesus is the fulfillment of everything that has been promised to Israel.

### **Encounter #2: Anna, A Prophetess (36-38).**

- Now Luke introduces a final character, Anna. His description of her presents her as a woman of devotion to God. She was a prophetess (cf. Acts 21:9; 1 Cor. 11:3-6; Acts 2:17-18), a daughter of Phanuel, who was of the tribe of Asher, and she was advanced in years. She had been married for seven years and then widowed for the rest of her life (either widowed for 84 additional years or until the age of 84). Regardless of which option you land on, it is clear that Anna was a woman who choose a lifetime of service to God over remarriage, an action that was highly regarded in the first-century religious community (cf. 1 Tim. 5:5).
- Her daily activity consisted of worship with fasting and prayer night and day at the temple. She was totally focused on serving God. Again, an exemplary saint.
- Anna was at the temple as well and saw Jesus. Instead of addressing Mary and Joseph like Simeon did, she addresses two different audiences.
  - First, she gives thanks and praise to God, for he was the one who was bringing about this “redemption of Jerusalem,” a phrase similar to Simeon’s “consolation of Israel.”
  - Second, she addresses those in the crowd who were also waiting for this same redemption. I love this because it reveals that there were people who actually got it. How did they know about this redemption? They had read the OT and understood it’s message. It was about God’s provision of a savior (see Luke 24:44-47).

### **Summary:**

- Simeon and Anna show that though there were pious Jews who lived a good life before Jesus came, they were still unfulfilled and unsatisfied. The pious of Israel still longed for the arrival of Jesus and the redemption and salvation that God promised.

### **II. Jesus is God’s Gift of Redemption for the World (31-33)**

- As we return to the end of Simeon’s prophetic hymn in verses 31-33, for the first time in Luke, Jesus’ coming and mission is explicitly related to the Gentiles.
- Jesus is “a light for revelation to the Gentiles”: Jesus brings the light into the darkness of sin and separation from God and the news for Gentiles is that his salvation extends to the entire world. The gospel is for every racial group.
- Simeon’s words are almost a direct quote of Isaiah 49:6, “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” You see, even in the OT, it was clear that God’s redemption wouldn’t just extend to Israel, but that Israel was simply an instrument to bring salvation to the nations.
- As a result of Simeon’s words, Luke says that Mary and Joseph “marveled” at what was said about him, namely that he would bring salvation to the entire world.
- At the end of Jesus’ life, after his resurrection, he would make this mission explicit with his disciples by commanding them to make disciples of all the nations.
- Application: This is why we exist as a church: to make disciples of all nations. When this mission is complete, Jesus will return. This is why we collect a Great Commission Offering once a year like we did last week. This is why we budget to support missionaries all over the world. This is the message that God uses to stir up people’s hearts to go to the

nations. Additionally, Christmas is a great opportunity to invite people from other cultures to share your family Christmas, especially those who feel far from home.

### **III. Jesus is a gift that demands a response (34-35)**

- Simeon's encounter with Joseph, Mary and Jesus ends on somewhat of a negative note. So far in Luke, we've heard a lot of great things about Jesus: Son of the Most High, a King who will forever reign on David's throne, the promised Messiah who will be Lord.
- This is the first ominous note about Jesus in Luke and it's this: he will divide Israel. This is the first hint of coming rejection and suffering for Jesus.
- This imagery of falling and rising draws from the OT where God's promised messiah is said to be a stone (Isa 8:14-15; 28:16; cf. Rom. 9:33).
- For some, he's a stumbling stone and they fall over him. For them, Jesus isn't a hope of promises fulfilled, but rather a figure who is to be opposed.
- For others, he's a precious cornerstone whom they stake their life on. For these, Jesus is God's promised savior and they embrace and receive him and rise.
- Jesus reveals what is in a person's heart (2:35). Jesus reveals your true colors. You can't remain neutral with Jesus. You either come to him as your king or you reject him to be your own king.
- Jesus is also going to have a negative effect on Mary. He uses graphic imagery to predict that Mary's soul will be pierced by a very large, broad, two-edged sword. Jesus is going to bring extreme emotional pain to his mom. It's not exactly clear what Simeon is referring he's most likely referring to a combination of two things: one being the pain and sorrow he brings her as he creates his own family of disciples with his own priorities (see Luke 2:41-52) and the second is the pain and sorrow he brings her by engaging in a ministry with such dedication that it results in his tragic death.

#### **Application related to evangelism:**

- I've found myself meditating on the imagery of falling and rising a good bit this week and here's what the Lord has impressed upon my heart.
- We shouldn't be surprised by opposition to Jesus. This isn't hard for us in New England to get, right. There's a lot of opposition to Jesus, even if it's in the form of apathy. Many will fall, not just in Israel but among the nations.
- But, we also shouldn't be surprised by receptivity to Jesus either because Jesus is in the business of not just revealing hearts, but changing hearts. Yes, some will fall. But, some will also rise. We know the end of the story. God will save people from every nation, tribe, people and language (Rev. 7:9-10).
- When you think of your relational network and people that God has placed in your path, what is your gut assumption concerning their response to Jesus? Rise or fall?
- The sovereign plan of God should give us incredible confidence in sharing the gospel. J. I. Packer, one of my favorite theologians, says,

“The sovereignty of God in grace gives us our only hope of success in evangelism...For it creates the possibility—indeed, the certainty—that evangelism will be fruitful. Apart from it, there is not even a possibility of evangelism being fruitful. Were it not for the sovereign grace of

God, evangelism would be the most futile and useless enterprise that the world has ever seen, and there would be no more complete waste of time under the sun than to preach the Christian gospel” (Packer, 106).

- Packer continues and says this confidence and certainty of God’s sovereignty should affect our attitude towards evangelism in three ways:
  - It should make us bold: we should never write someone off as hopeless or beyond the reach of God.
  - It should make us patient: to give up on someone if we don’t see immediate results is a failure of faith in God.
  - It should make us prayerful: only God can save.

**Conclusion:**

- As Simeon and Anna received and embraced Jesus as their long-awaited savior, so should we and we should hold out this salvation to all people because God’s plan is to save a multitude of people from every nation, tribe, people and language. God’s gift of salvation is for all. Remember, many will rise. Let’s leave today with immense confidence in the sovereign grace and power of God to save even the hardest of hearts.