

Luke 2:28-35

Dear Friends in Christ,

What an unusual day it was for Mary and Joseph. They had come to the temple to fulfill the law's demand regarding the purification of Mary after childbirth and regarding the offering for a first-born son. Among all the people at the temple that day they hardly stood out. They didn't have a large retinue of servants with them; they couldn't even afford a lamb and had to substitute doves. Since their families lived in Nazareth and Jesus had been born in Bethlehem and they had stayed there until this time, there were likely no relatives with them. It was just the three of them, Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus, blending in among the other families who had come to make their required offerings.

It was certainly amazing then, that Simeon, who had never met them before in his life, would find them among the crowds in the temple courts. It would have been like trying to find a friend at a sporting event among 90,000 fans when you had no idea where they were sitting. Luke tells us that Simeon was guided to them by the Holy Spirit.

Some commentators also find it amazing that Mary lets this strange man take Jesus from her arms into his own. But the most amazing thing about this incident in the temple courts is that Simeon was able to see and speak accurately about Jesus' destiny. He spoke with Mary and Joseph about how Jesus would reveal God's heart, and men's hearts.

The first thing Simeon did when he took Jesus into his arms was to praise the Lord for his faithfulness. Luke tells us that God had promised Simeon that he would get to see the Messiah in person before he died. Simeon acknowledged that God had kept his promise. The Holy Spirit not only led him to Mary and Joseph but enabled him to believe that this little baby was indeed the Lord's Christ. Now Simeon could leave the temple courts and live with peace in his heart, confident that God had provided the savior he had promised. And, when the time came, he could die in peace, trusting that his sins were forgiven and he would enter the Promised Land of Heaven.

We still use his song of praise to God most communion Sundays because as we receive the body and blood of Jesus in the Supper we are assured that our sins are forgiven and we, like Simeon, can leave the church with peace in our hearts, and, when the time comes, we can die in peace.

God's faithfulness to Simeon shows us a lot about the love and grace that is God's heart. But Simeon calls our attention to even more that shows what's in God's heart. God not only kept his promise to Simeon, He was keeping his promise to Israel, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; but not only to Israel. God made the first promise of a Savior to Adam and Eve, the parents of all human beings. Simeon says, **my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of your people Israel.**

This Jesus, the Messiah, the Savior, would bring glory to Israel. For all eternity it would be said that salvation was of the Jews, that the savior was born to a descendant of Abraham and David. But, salvation was not just for the Jews. It was always intended that the savior would be for all people. Though the gentiles were walking in the darkness of sin and idolatry, many would be brought to the light of faith, to believe that God's son, their Savior, was born of a Jew in Israel. Jesus reveals that God's heart is filled with love and grace for all people

That Simeon found Mary and Joseph and Jesus in the temple courts; that he recognized who they were and that the baby Jesus was the promised Savior; that he proclaimed that the salvation he would bring would be not just for Israel but for all people; all these things were amazing. Yet, other than finding them in the temple courts, the things that Simeon said were all things a student of the Old Testament would have known. What Simeon says next is even more amazing because he mentions things that would not have been easily known from Scripture.

It almost seems as if Simeon is already standing at the foot of the cross of Jesus. He sees who is there. He sees the Jewish leaders mocking Jesus. Their words and actions reveal what was in their hearts. They show themselves to be what Jesus had called them—**whitewashed graves**. They looked religious and upright on the outside, but their hearts were filled with greed and hatred and jealousy. Although they studied and even claimed to expound the Scriptures their pride kept them from seeing the whole point of the Scriptures; that they were sinners who needed a savior and that savior was right there in front of their eyes. Their rejection of Jesus revealed what was in their hearts. He became a rock that made them fall.

He sees at the cross of Jesus the two criminals. He sees Jesus' crucifixion reveal the heart of the one criminal, who even though he is about to die, mocks and blasphemes. But he also sees the crucifixion reveal the heart of the other criminal, who recognizes his sinfulness, realizes he is getting what he deserves, and throws himself on the mercy of Jesus as his savior asking Jesus to remember him when he comes into his kingdom.

Beneath the cross of Jesus he also sees Mary and the Apostle John with her. He sees her suffering, the suffering of a mother who is witnessing the execution of her son, a son she loves and knows is innocent. He describes the pain she will feel—**a sword will pierce your own soul too**.

Simeon saw what Paul experienced. Christ crucified is **a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles**. He is still today a **sign that is spoken against so that the hearts of many are revealed**.

The Bible says that the one and only Savior of the world is Jesus of Nazareth, born a Jew of the Virgin Mary. He lived a perfect life, suffered and died on the cross, was buried and then rose victorious on the third day. He reveals God's heart. He reveals that in love God gives salvation as a free gift of his grace, purchased by Jesus, so that it is available to everyone.

Some respond by saying, "if he was a Jew I don't want anything to do with him. Nazareth, can anything good come from there?" Jesus reveals a heart that is filled with blinding national pride and racism.

Some respond by saying, "A virgin birth; a perfect life; a resurrection from the dead; who are you trying to kid? That's foolishness. None of those things could have really happened." Jesus reveals a heart that refuses to believe in the supernatural or in miracles.

Some respond by saying, "A crucified savior? What kind of God requires such a thing?" Jesus reveals a heart that has fashioned its own God, a God who is all love and no justice. He reveals a heart that refuses to acknowledge the seriousness of sin.

Since all of us have a human nature, we have all at least been tempted to think in these ways at one time or another. But, by God's grace, the Holy Spirit has broken our pride. He has used the law of God to humble us and move us to admit that we are lost and condemned creatures. He has enabled us to see that what we deserve from God is his punishment, already now on

earth and forever in Hell. He has enabled us to see that there is nothing that we can do on our own, by our own power, to escape the punishment we deserve.

When someone hears that the only savior of the world is Jesus of Nazareth, born of the Virgin Mary, who lived a perfect life, suffered and died on a cross, and rose again on the third day, and they say “thank you Lord,” a heart of faith is revealed. They have joined Simeon in saying, **Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people.** That’s a heart where humble faith dwells. That’s a heart that says, “In the cross of Christ I glory; nothing in my hands I bring simply to the cross I cling. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!”

Still today Jesus is the cause of the falling and rising of many. Those who reject him and curse him and mock his followers reveal that they are fallen. Their words and actions reveal a heart of pride and unbelief. Those who proclaim him as the Lord’s salvation, the glory of Israel and the light of the Gentiles, their Savior, reveal that they are risen. Their words and actions reveal a heart of humility and trust.

What an amazing day it was for Mary and Joseph in the temple courts. Simeon saw and proclaimed their child’s destiny. His life, death and resurrection would reveal the heart of God, God’s perfect justice and his perfect love. The reaction to his life, death and resurrection would forever more reveal the hearts of men.