

Luke 2:22-32 "Consolation: The Undeserved Prize"

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[0:00] Hi, my name is George Sinclair. I'm the lead pastor of Church of the Messiah.

! It is wonderful that you would like to check out some of the sermons done by Church of the Messiah, either by myself or some of the others. Listen, just a couple of things. First of all, would you pray for us that we will open God's Word well to His glory and for the good of people like yourself?

The second thing is, if you aren't connected to a church and if you are a Christian, we really, I would really like to encourage you to find a good local church where they believe the Bible, they preach the gospel, and if you have some trouble finding that, send us an email. We will do what we can to help connect you with a good local church wherever you are. And if you're a non-Christian, checking us out, we're really, really, really glad you're doing that. Don't hesitate to send us questions. It helps me actually to know, as I'm preaching, how to deal with the types of things that you're really struggling with. So God bless.

Let's just bow our heads in prayer for a moment, please. Father, it is so good that we can join with Christians around the world singing your praises. We give you thanks and praise that we could sing with Christians throughout the ages your praises, even Father, words from Ambrose in the 300s. We give you thanks and praise, Father, for this. And now, Lord, we ask that you bring your Word home to us, that your Holy Spirit would bring this part of your Word written deep into our hearts to form us.

And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Please be seated. So I'm going to just talk for a couple of minutes, a shorter than normal sermon. If you're looking at the time, it won't be 40 minutes. Here's the thing. The Bible never promises...

[2:02] You know, it must be really hard for Canadians practicing Canadian Christmas, because Canadian Christmas is all about family, gifts, food, you know, all of that type of stuff.

And if your family is fractured, if you're all alone, if you don't have very much money, and it's not all about, you know, everybody else is happy and you're not, it must be very hard. But we practice... I mean, on one hand, we join in with Canadian Christmas, but we practice Bible Christmas, Christian Christmas. And the Bible never promises to Christians that they will never be sad. It never promises that we won't be disappointed, or that we will have loss, or setbacks, or grief. It never promises any of us any of these scars that happen from living. What it does promise is that, on one hand, by God's common grace, this happens for many people, but for Christians, the promise is that even though we have scars, we will not live a scarred life in Christ. That's the promise, that we can move from our scars and our hard things that have happened to us and our setbacks to a, in a type of, a second innocence. Not the original innocence that we had before those terrible things happened to us, but a new innocence on the other side of these bad things that have happened to us. And so we're going to look at that very briefly this morning, but before we do that, I'm going to have to say something which is politically controversial, and in certain contexts could get me in trouble. And I guess I'm on YouTube, so maybe I will get in trouble for it. But I have to talk about this thing. Normally, I don't talk about things. I mean, I'll often talk about things that have cultural or moral or political consequences without necessarily drawing it out. But today, I am going to draw it out very specifically, because it's important for the points that follow. So if you have your Bibles, you know, why do I talk about not living a scarred life? If you have your Bibles, turn with me to Luke chapter 2, and we're going to be looking at Luke chapter 2, verses 22 to 35. Luke chapter 2, 22 to 35. And the words of the Bible will be on the screen if you don't have your own. And what's just happened is Luke is, Luke was a pagan who became a

Christian. We don't know how he became a Christian. We just know that he was a pagan who became a Christian, very well-educated man of the world. He becomes a Christian, and then he decides he's going to write a biography of Jesus. And so he consults eyewitnesses and writes an eyewitness-based biography of Jesus written while eyewitnesses were still alive. And what we've seen so far is the birth of John the Baptist, then the birth of Jesus, and the angels, and all of that. And then just before this, Jesus was circumcised, and now we come to a part of the story that's 40 days after the birth of Jesus, and here is how it goes. And when the time came for their purification, that's the purification of Joseph and Mary, which by the way implies that there was no midwife available to help Mary when Jesus was born and that Joseph had to function as the midwife. It's all part of, in a sense, Jesus is the humble and almost dire situation of his birth. So I'll just read that again.

And when the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought Jesus up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord, as it is written in the law of the Lord. And that's what we call the Old Testament, and our Jewish friends call the Tanakh. Every male who opens, who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord. And they came to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, a pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons. Now there was a man, now by the way, I'm going to return to this in a moment. What was just said here, there's several really significant things that were just said there, but I'll come back to it in a moment. Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel.

You know, that's what I'm going to be mainly trying to talk about in my few minutes that I have, about consolation. Jesus isn't just one who consoles, he is in and of himself consolation.

[6 : 44] So we read that again, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to Simeon by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ, or the Lord's Messiah. And Simeon came in the Spirit into the temple, the temple in Jerusalem. And when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him according to the custom of the law, Simeon took Jesus up in his arms and blessed God and said, and we'll get to that in a moment. Now, here's the thing about this which is very controversial, but it's very important that I point it out, because it's really important for the things which are going to follow.

It has become a commonplace in demonstrations on our streets, all across this country and around the world, especially at Christmas, for Muslim activists and other activists with megavones and shouting to say that Jesus was a Palestinian. That is a lie.

George, tell us what you really think. That is a lie. And it's really hard for us to deal with people who lie with profound confidence, self-confidence and assert lies with megaphones in large crowds. But it's important that we not be formed by lies. Jesus was Jewish.

Jesus was Jewish. I mean, it's all the way through this text. His parents, he's born in the Jewish homeland. He is present in the Jewish temple. He is fulfilling, he has been circumcised to be a Jewish male. His parents are obviously poor but observant Jews, and they are going to fulfill the other acts that are important for him because they want to obey the Jewish law in the Jewish temple, in the Jewish homeland.

Jesus was Jewish. The Quran, written almost 650 years after this, well actually potentially even later because it was written after Muhammad died, but that's a whole other kettle of whole bag of worms.

[9 : 04] But the Quran affirms that Jesus wasn't Jewish, that he was Muslim. And the Quran is simply wrong. It's simply wrong. It was just something that Muhammad said. But Jesus being Jewish is both in all of the ancient documents and is also recorded in both Jewish and pagan writers. Jesus was Jewish. And it's important for us to remember this. It's important as we get into the Nunc Dimitis. And it's also really important for us as we come to realize this next very profound thing that's going to be said. So it's been, Simeon has said that he's going to understand and see the the consolation of Israel, that he's going to actually see this, the consolation of Israel. And now he's holding Jesus in his arms. And this is really important for the topic of consolation. Jesus's parents were poor.

This is really important for us because it's very easy for us to be caught up in cultural prejudices against the poor. But Jesus was poor. Simeon was probably of some means. Jesus's parents were lower working class. Think people who work at Tim Hortons, not people who own Tim Hortons.

And he would have been clothed like a lower working class. He would have been wrapped in the type of cloth that a lower working class parents could afford. And in the years to come before his public ministry, he would have worn lower working class clothes. He had lower working class jobs. He would have eaten the food of the lower class. He would have had a lower class rural accent. Not a high class accent, but a lower working class accent. And his friends and everybody that he mainly associated were lower working class.

And this is really important because, you see, God, the Son of God, chose to come and be our Savior and be the consolation of our hearts in such a way.

He would have known what it was like to do some work and have a rich and powerful man refuse to pay. He would have known what it was like to bang his hands and hurt his hands in physical labor.

[11 : 42] He would have known what it was like because he would have heard the wails and the cries of the women in the village at a time when a large percentage of women died in childbirth or children died within the first couple of years. And he would have grown up hearing the wails and the crying of those parents.

And that is the world he grew up in. And even if I lose you for the rest of my short sermon, one of the things which is so important for us as Christians is that not only did Jesus, of course, because of his crucifixion when we see him in glory, he will have scars on his hands.

He did not die unscarred. He was a carpenter, a stonemason. They lose parts of fingers. They have crushed knuckles.

He was a working-class man. And he would have known the trials and temptations that we know only without sin. And so we can pour our hearts out to him when we suffer setbacks and have pain and sorrow and sighing. We can pour our hearts out to one who was Emmanuel, God with us. He is the consolation of our hearts by first being with us. But these things are also really important. Let's continue reading.

So we'll go back to verse 26. Now we'll go back to read verse 25. Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel.

[13:28] So the other different songs of the Savior that we've been doing to try to help us to understand who Jesus is, this one, the big idea, apart from him being Savior and all, is that he is the consolation of our hearts. That's how we're to understand him being born. And then it continues, verse 26.

And it had been fully revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he, that is Simeon, would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. And so Simeon came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents of Jesus, his soon-to-be-adopted father and his biological mother, brought in the child Jesus to do for him according to the custom of the law, Simeon took up in his arms this 40, not even six-week-old baby, not even six weeks old.

He took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace according to your word. 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.

Look at that verse 29 again. Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace according to your word. You know one of the things right off the bat which is so consoling about the Bible? In a world that values lies and surface and flash over substance and truth, the Bible is true. God speaks true words to us. Isn't that just in and of itself consoling in a world that loves lies? It is so profoundly consoling to know that God speaks and makes promises. In a world where people don't keep their promises, God keeps his promises.

He keeps his word. His word is true. His word is fulfilled. We can trust his word. In a world full of lies, we can seek the truth in God's word. And because God's word is true, those who follow Jesus should seek as much as possible to be people of the truth. Which does not mean, I had a, oh no, I won't go there. It does not mean we are narrow-minded and think we know all the answers because we don't. I mean, if anything else, we should understand that when we say that God is God, it means we're not. And that means you need to ask questions and be curious and inquisitive and be slow to rush to judgment, to seek to get more information so you can know the truth. But we should be people of the truth. But here's the thing which is really important about that. How do we define all these terms? What does it mean to be that Jesus is consolation? What does it mean that he is Lord and Master? What does it mean that he is Savior? What does all of these things mean? I just had a long conversation with a person outside the Christian faith. She's a really fine, fine, fine young woman.

[16:21] I, I, she always helps me when I've had conversations with her about Christianity because she helps me to see my blind spots and try to speak more accurately to her. And, and, and here's the thing which is so important about this. You see, because when we just hear these words, when we hear Lord and we hear Savior, and, and what we do is we start to bring in our own type of imagination and, and the way religions work and spiritualities work. And, and so that, that means it's going to be maybe something technocratic or it's going to be something economic or it's going to be something political or it's going to be something cultural or God forbid it will be what always happens that seems to be the case of the religions of the world that God for his own good and God for his own glory in the religions of the world and the spiritualities of the world sends other people out to die. And if we didn't have this story which follows, which is a true story, an historical story, not just a Santa Claus story, but a true story of what really happens in real life, it's, it's the story that starts to fulfill all of these things in. I mean, just think about it for this whole thing, that this whole thing is that the Savior is not even six weeks old and Simeon is holding him in his arms. And, and we look at the story and however we understand who

God really is, however we understand who the Savior really is, we understand it from the story and we go, we're so cool. That's what God is like. He's willing to humble himself.

That's what God is like. He comes and he, he feeds people who are hungry. That's what God is like. He, he, he, he accepts the, the woman who's been shunned by everybody else. That's what God is like. He stills the storm.

That's what God is like. And it goes on and on and on. And by the end of the story, we see that is what God is like. That while every other God and religion in the history of the world and every ideology is always sending other people out other than the powerful, sending other people other than the powerful out to die for the good of the powerful, the Bible means by salvation that God comes and dies for other people, for their good. Completely the opposite of the way the world is. The story fills in the details. That's why the story is so important. That's amongst other reasons why we have to say to those who lie about Jesus not being Jewish, have to be rebutted. Jesus was Jewish. These aspects of the story all follow.

And so as, as, as we go through this text and we get to see that Jesus, amongst other things, I mean, he's so important because why, why do we feel so much sorrow at different times in our lives? We feel sorrow in our lives because we struggle with guilt and our need for forgiveness. And as we read the story of the Gospels, we see that Jesus came, that we might know the forgiveness of God by putting our faith and trust in Jesus. That Jesus' death upon the cross. I mean, here's the other thing I shared with this person, but why the story is so important. Like, you know, I just described the story of calming waves and feeding the five, you know, feeding people and, and, and healing and all of those types of things. And I said to my friend, I said, you know, if you read all these stories and you come to the end, you realize that when Jesus is dying on the cross, if all these stories are true, and I believe they are, when Jesus dies on the cross, it's very obvious that the soldiers in the nails cannot keep Jesus to the cross.

[19:54] that what keeps Jesus on the cross dying is his love for you and for me. That's what keeps him on the cross.

Lord, now let your servant depart in peace. It literally should be master. In fact, the word for Lord, there isn't the word for God. It's the word that we get dictator from in English. And he said, I don't want to give up control. And we can all relate to that. But here's the thing.

Why wouldn't I want to give up control of my life to truth? Why wouldn't I want to give up control of my life to love? Why wouldn't I want to give up control of my life to consolation? Why wouldn't I want to give up control of my life to beauty? Why wouldn't I want to give up control of my life to justice? And if you put it in that particular way, which the story of the Bible here is pushing as true, that means I would rather have injustice and lies and evil rather than submit to goodness and truth and beauty. There is no better time now if you are a seeker. There is no better time than now if you are a seeker to call out to God and ask that Jesus will be your Savior and your Lord and he will not turn anyone away. I need to close a little bit about this whole thing of consolation.

It often happens that when I'm going to preach on a topic, dang it all, something happens in my week connected to it. And I'm not going to go into the details, but I got some news that was meant to encourage me that depressed me deeply. Not deeply, that's exaggerating. It really depressed me and saddened me. And I'm trying to, this is, I'm such a dumb man so many times. I'm thinking to myself, I got to get over my sadness because I got to work on a sermon on consolation.

[23 : 31] And it was like, one of you guys was praying for me that moment because it was like the Holy Spirit said, no, no, George, you need to go right now to God, to Jesus for some consolation. Stop working on the sermon about consolation and be consoled. And that's what I did. Closed my Bible, prayed right there in the coffee shop with my eyes closed about the sadness that I was going through.

And here's one of the things which is so wonderful about sadness, about being, coming to console with Christ. He did, as I'm praying to him and I'm just pouring out my heart to him, it's not, I didn't have this sense as I'm thinking about the scriptures that, oh, George, everything about you is perfect and it's all going to work. You know what came to me? Several things. One of the things that came to me is that the reason I was sad was because I had unrecognized idols in my life that I had to repent of.

And I had unrecognized unbelief in my heart that Jesus really is the master and Lord. And that the final word about me in him will be, well done, welcome.

And I really needed to have that time of a gut check to come and both repent and to hold on to the true promises of God. And that's what I needed. And I was consoled. Because you see, here's the thing, friends, brothers and sisters, in Christ. You are way more in Christ than the bad things that happened to you. And he doesn't want to just sort of pat you on the shoulder or give you something like a drug.

He wants to have your heart pure and cleaned up and all those idols gone and cling to who he is and his promises and to know his well done and to accept that even though you don't know how things are going to work out in the future, he has given you good blessings today. And I could go on and on about that.

[25 : 38] But that's all I want to say is you pour out your heart to him. And it's not just a simple matter. But there is peace on the other side of the bad news.

I can testify to him. You see, Jesus isn't a consolation prize. He is the undeserved prize of consolation to the brokenhearted.

Invite you to stand. Bow your heads in prayer. Father, thank you that you were willing to hum... Father, we thank you that you sent your son to be our savior. Thank you, Father, that God, the son of God, was willing to set aside his glory and divine prerogatives in remaining fully God to enter into our human world as a zygote in the womb of the Virgin Mary, that he was willing to go through birth and be a helpless baby. We give you thanks and praise that he is Emmanuel. We give you thanks and praise that he came and walked amongst us and know the sorrows of our hearts at a deep level himself, to know what it's like to be tempted to sin, only to not sin. We give you thanks and praise for his miracles, for his teaching, for his kindness and goodness and beauty. We give you thanks and praise that he was willing to die on the cross for us as our substitute. We give you thanks and praise that it is in him, by faith in him, that our primal wound of being separated from you is dealt with and healed when we put our trust in him. We give you thanks and praise for his mighty resurrection, for the new covenant, that we can be your new covenant people, that we can be your child by adoption and grace. Father, we thank you for all of these things, and we ask that these truths would profoundly form us, and that in those times of sorrow and setback in our lives, that we would call out to Jesus, knowing not just that he is Savior and Lord, but he is, but he is our consolation. And we ask all these things in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen.

Amen.