

AM Luke 2:22-40 Where is your Reassurance?

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[0 : 00] Our reading this morning is taken from the New Testament, from Luke chapter 2, verses 22 to 40. So Luke, chapter 2, verses 22 to 40.

And when the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. As it is written in the law of the Lord, every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord, and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord.

A pair of turtle doves are two young pigeons. Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.

And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came in the Spirit into the temple.

And when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him according to the custom of the law, 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.

[1 : 38] For my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for the revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.

And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother, Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of Mary in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed.

And a sword will pierce through your own soul also, so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed. And there was a prophetess Anna, the daughter of Pheno, of the tribe of Asher.

She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, and then as a widow until she was 84. She did not depart from the temple, worshipping with fasting and prayer night and day.

And coming up at that very hour, she began to give thanks to God, and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem. When they had performed everything according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee to their own town of Nazareth.

[3 : 03] And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom and the favour of God was upon him. Thanks be to God for the reading of his holy word, and to his name be the praise and the glory for ever.

Amen. Let's pray. Father, we thank you for the reading of your holy word.

And as we come to study it, we ask that the thoughts of our minds and the words of my mouth be acceptable in your sights. These things we ask through Christ, our Saviour, your Son.

Amen. So, to begin with this morning, just a brief question. Where is your reassurance?

Where is your reassurance? In the passage we read from Luke this morning, we see Jesus being presented in the temple, in line with the usual expected religious journey of a firstborn son.

[4 : 17] The excitement of his birth and of his circumcision has passed. The excitement of the Christmas story is now at an end.

The Magi, the three wise men from Matthew's Gospel, are returning home. The shepherds have returned to their flocks, and the animals are back in the stable, feeding at the manger.

And we have an everyday story taking place in the temple. We are party to an unfolding drama about the mundane events of life in the Jerusalem temple.

And to that, we have not one, but two witnesses to the events that are about to take place. And both of them proclaim the wonders of the child that is presented in the temple that morning.

We also learn that both witnesses don't come there by chance, but are led by the Holy Spirit. So let's take a moment to look at these witnesses and the language that is used to describe them.

[5 : 37] To describe them, their hopes, and their actions. Many of the phrases are not in the language that we would use on a day-to-day basis.

So first we meet Simeon. And we're told that he's described as a man of righteousness and they've been devout. But what does that mean in today's language?

Well, righteousness can be seen as being just. Or to a first century Jew, it would mean to be in right standing before God.

And in the previous chapter, in chapter one of Luke, Luke had referred to Zechariah and his wife, the mother and father of John the Baptist, as being righteous.

They walked blamelessly in all the commandments and the laws of God. Simeon was also devout. It means he was reverent, showing deep religious commitment.

[6 : 38] And he waited for the consolation of Israel. Now there's a word that we certainly don't use. So what does the consolation of Israel actually mean?

It's a prophetic term for the Messiah, the Saviour, the promised deliverer of the Jewish nation. So for Christians, he is the Saviour of the world.

And we also meet Anna, a prophetess, who worshipped in the temple day and night. Luke takes time to establish the credibility of these two witnesses at Jesus' presentation, highlighting their devotion to God, with both giving praise to God for seeing the Messiah.

And Luke highlights that Jesus is significant for all society. In his use of Simeon and of Anna, he includes all of society.

He includes women and men. And we see also the poor background that Jesus comes from, that Jesus is brought up in.

[7 : 58] After all, Jesus lived in poverty and he died with nothing but the clothes he wore. A far contrast from some of the supposed celebrations of his birth over the last month or so.

And a far cry from the normal birth and life of a ruler, of a king. We see it in the poverty of Mary and Joseph as they bring the purification offering in verse 24.

They bring a pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons. If we look to Leviticus when the law is recorded in chapter 12, we're told that the offering for purification is a lamb as a burnt offering and a pigeon or turtle dove for a sin offering.

But in verse 8 we read that if she cannot afford a lamb, she was to bring two doves or two young pigeons. One for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering.

In this way the priest will make atonement for her and she will be clean. But Jesus did not come to simply save the material poor but those poor in spirit who realise their needs for a saviour.

[9 : 25] and it goes beyond Jewish society to be inclusive of all humanity. The idea is reflected in the words of Simeon in verse 32 that Jesus was a light of revelation to the Gentiles and a blessing to Israel.

But Simeon also has a warning for Mary as she rejoices in the life of her growing son like any mother would. He saw that one day Jesus would create a division among the Jewish people and a division that still divides the world today.

Many would reject him and so fall under God's punishment but others would receive him and so rise to salvation. So we can see the cycle of the story.

We see God making a promise. We see God fulfilling his promise and then in the midst of it we see the implications for all who meet Jesus.

So now that we have looked at the narrative let's look at its meaning for us today. What it tells us about God and his interaction with man. Central is the salvation of man.

[10 : 49] We see in Simeon God's revelation to all mankind and Anna proclaims the redemption of his people. First we have a promise to Simeon a promise that God fulfills that he would see God's saviour of the world before he died.

He proclaims Simeon proclaims that he can now die in peace as he has seen God's salvation. He has seen in the form of a child the one who is the saviour of the world.

This is not a new phenomenon. God will make and importantly keeps his promises. He still we have the assurance of God's past history.

His interaction with man from Adam and Eve first and against him. He still cared for them. He still clothed them. He still provided for them and he made covenants with their offspring Abraham Moses and David.

He made agreements with them and he fulfilled his side of agreements even when humanity failed to keep theirs. We as mere mortals make promises which we have every intention of keeping but we do not have the power to keep or the means to fulfil.

[12:21] Some of us may even make promises that we have no intentions of keeping. Such is the heart of man and humanity. But this is not the behaviour of our God.

He is truth. He is all powerful and he is unchanging. He does not make promises that he will not fulfil. He does not give us false hope.

Why is it impossible for God to fail on his promises? His past actions show us they tell us that he fulfils his promises. We see in the proclamation of Simeon that God fulfils his promises.

Simeon declares he has seen the coming of the Messiah the saviour of the world. Can you place such trust in the promises of your fellow friends in humanity?

How often have you been let down by those you trust? It hurts and it can take what seems forever to move on from.

[13:28] But what God has promised he will bring to fruition in his time and he bids us to be patient for that time. We learn here from Simeon an old man that if we wait upon God his promises will be fulfilled.

One of our great encouragements in the gospel is that God's purpose is unchanging. His purpose is to keep his promise of blessing of his people through Jesus Christ.

We see this next in Simeon's song of praise to God. We see the implication of Jesus' birth for humanity. After giving praise for seeing the Messiah in person he gives the details of the blessings he will bring to the world.

Simeon says that Jesus will bring a light to the world for them to see the route to salvation. In verse 32 he says a light for revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of your people Israel.

Luke here contrasts the separation that existed between Israel and the rest of the world. Israel is God's chosen people through whom he would bless all nations.

[14:50] Luke's two lines here highlight that division but also that Jesus would bring a hope to all. No longer was there a need to be a division between Israel and the world.

He describes Jesus as a light for the Gentiles, a light to the whole world. division between Jew and Gentile was ended. And that's emphasised in Matthew's final chapter when Jesus gives the great commission to his disciples in Matthew 28 19 to 20.

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

And surely I'm with you always to the very end of the age. If we look back at chapter 1 Simeon here reiterates Zachariah's statement in verse 79 that Jesus comes to give light to those who live in darkness and in the shadow of death.

Zachariah and Simeon both proclaim that Christ offers light which brings life to those who believe in him and who accept him as their saviour.

[16:14] Now if you can bear with us just a moment we'll jump to the end of the passage to the story of Anna. The prophetess who speaks to everyone who was waiting for the coming of Christ.

Importantly she spoke of Jesus to all who were waiting for the redemption of Israel. but what was her urgency? Why was she so consumed with telling people?

Because in Christ the redemption of Israel was no more about the blessing of one nation and God's deliverance of it which is what the religious Jews were awaiting.

Israel had been a poor messenger and witness for God. They were to be a blessing to the nations. they had time and again turned from God's commandments and they had failed to be a blessing to the nations.

They had taken the easy road of allowing life to drift along and to live like and adopt the practices of their neighbours. Even the wisest of men Solomon rejects God's teachings.

[17:26] In 1 Kings chapter 11 4-13 we read of how his heart was turned away from God and how he built altars to the false gods of his many wives.

Despite the nation's continued rebellion God had cared for them and redeemed them from times of slavery and bondage and when they could not free themselves God still brought them out into freedom.

We can think of God's release of the Israelites from bondage in Egypt where they were slaves. His deliverance of them as he parted the Red Sea so the Israelites could safely cross and enclose in

the waters destroying Pharaoh's might.

We can recall the freeing of his people from captivity in Babylon and providing for the return to the promised land. We can see how he gave victory to them in ways that showed it was by God's power and not by the abilities of men.

We think of the story of Gideon and the reduction of his army to only 300 men. So it is clear that the victory was by God's actions not Gideon's and Israelite army.

[18 : 51] Redemption for the Jew had a nationalistic identity. It was about the restoration of Israel as a nation. That they could throw off the yoke of Roman oppression and once more be a free people.

And Anna announces that the redemption of Israel and of the world had come in the form of a lowly child. A redemption that would be through faith alone and by the forgiveness of sin.

It was not the freeing of a nation. It was going to be a personal redemption of faith. If we go back to Zachariah's song in verse 76 and 77 he predicts about John the Baptist his son redemption.

And you my child will be called a prophet of the most high. For you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him to give his people the knowledge of salvation through forgiveness of their sins.

Redemption was no more about acts of the law by offerings of sacrifices but by the forgiveness of our sins. And our acceptance is Christ as our redeemer.

[20 : 10] It is by our faith in Christ alone. An idea that goes against society's ideas that there are many religions and each is a valid way to God for those who believe in them.

You'll hear people say aren't all religions the same? Don't Jews, Christians and Muslims believe in the same God? Isn't living a good life what is important?

Isn't that enough? You'll hear folks say I don't need to go to church I'll lead a good life. Isn't it divisive to preach that there is only one true way to God?

Jesus is clear in his teachings that he is the way, the truth and the life and no one comes to the Father but by him.

To go back to the end of Simeon's speech, he saw that one day Jesus would create a division amongst the Jewish people.

[21 : 20] Many would reject him and so fall under God's punishment but others would receive him and so rise to salvation. In verse 34 Simeon says, this child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel.

And people will be quick to say, but how can a caring God agree to causing division? It's not God that causes division, it's us that causes division.

That division is caused by man, by our decisions to reject God, to close our hearts to God's love. It is us who cause the division, we are the ones who have the choice to make.

Jesus comes to proclaim God's love for humanity and his plan for man's salvation. He has been revealed to the world and he has come to redeem the world as man cannot save himself.

As he declares in John 3, 16-18, for God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

[22 : 40] For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe condemns already, because they have not believed the name of God's one and only son.

Jesus brings us a message of salvation that requires of us a response, that requires to accept or to refuse his offer of forgiveness of our sins and eternal life.

Yes, Jesus' message is to bring peace to his people, to ease our burdens, but we require to make a choice. We cannot sit on the fence.

Well, we can. We can question and hold off in our decision making. We can procrastinate. Well, I'd like to make a decision only if I knew about.

Well, I would make a decision only God or Jesus would show me. We can't procrastinate, we can't hold off, but this stance is a stance taken by many, but it is a stance that leaves us outside of Christ's salvation, because we have failed to make a choice.

[24 : 04] No one can know everything about God. We all have questions. We all have learning to do, but we are saved by having faith in Christ alone, and then growing in our knowledge of Christ.

It is not God or Jesus who condemns us. God sent Jesus to save the world, not to condemn it. We are condemned by our choices, by our sin.

We are condemned to death and eternal separation from God, because we refuse to let the light of God into our lives. Jesus waits for you to ask him into your life, a life that will be for eternity, or you can continue with earth's fleeting pleasures that never fulfill or reach your satisfaction.

We can continue with the sham of Christmas celebrations, or we can accept Christ as real and part of our lives.

You can trust in the promises of this world God that fail or are ever moving, or we can choose the certainty of Christ and the promises of God.

[25 : 29] But our story does not finish with the implications for ourselves in meeting Jesus Christ and accepting Christ as our Saviour. If we accept Christ as our Saviour, he also makes demands upon us.

the story doesn't finish and everybody lives happily ever after. We look to Christ for the light that will provide us with eternal life.

So we must also be willing to follow in his directions for our life. In Matthew 5, 14 to 16, Jesus compares us to the light that we cannot keep to ourselves.

we cannot keep it hidden from the world. He says, you are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden, nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand and it gives light to all in the house.

In the same way, let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. We are compared to the light of the world.

[26 : 41] We are not suddenly divine and we are not suddenly in Christ's place. But we are a reflection of Christ in the earth and the role that he is playing in our lives is a reflection of his love for others.

So as believers, we reflect the light of Christ so that all can see it in us. The light is evident to others by our good deeds which we do in faith.

And through the power of the Holy Spirit we don't do good works as a means of salvation. Our witness to the world, the light we shine is but a shadow to that of Christ who brings salvation to all who accept him, a saviour through faith alone.

So we can have the assurance of God, God's promises, even into our old age. we can celebrate Christmas once a year and then put it back in its box or we can celebrate the promises of God being fulfilled by accepting Christ into our lives.

And our task is to accept that gift of Christ as our saviour. let's pray. Father, we thank you for the gift that you have gave us of your son, Jesus Christ, who came to die and to meet the penalties of sin, that he paid the price for us.

[28 : 33] we give you thanks that though he was sinless, he took on our sins and that we in turn may be clothed in his righteousness and so once more can come before you.

For those of us who question Christ as our saviour and are still looking to make a decision, we pray that you pour out your spirit and your grace upon us.

Open our hearts and let us be moved by the Holy Spirit to accept Christ as our saviour, as our redeemer. These things we ask through Christ our Lord, your son.

Amen. Amen.