

The One Destined to Redeem and Reveal

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- [0 : 0 0] Now it's that time of year again where I indulge in too many movies over Christmas. And so the sorry result is that I'm going to begin my sermon with a quiz about movies.
- It's going to be audience participation. Actually, I'm not going to limit it to just movies. It's going to include books or stories as well. So here's the question, and I'd like you to just share the answer with the person next to you and see how many you can get.
- And the question is this. Which movies or books do you know where there is a child in the story which is destined for greatness or to be the savior of the story?
- All right, go for it. Talk to each other. See how many you can come up with. You're looking for a child destined for greatness. Okay. Does anyone want to shout out your answer to me?
- Just stand up and shout it out. Got to get in quick if you want the easy ones. Harry Potter. Harry Potter. Who said that? Star Wars. Star Wars. In what sense, Star Wars? Oh, well, there's a big one.
- [1 : 0 7] You can go with Anakin Walker, Luke Skywalker, or whoever that girl, Lizzie Rowe, in one of the fours will make it. Yep, okay. I saw a robot the other day. Okay. I know nothing.
- All right. Okay. Yes? Any more? Charlie and the Chocolate Factory. Really? I didn't have that one on my list.
- We'll have to quiz you on that one. Any more? To find greatness. To find greatness. The Power of One. Someone said there? Yeah. Is that that movie about...
- Okay. Thank you. That one's a few years ago, I think. Some of the people here might not have been born. How to Train Your Dragon. Any others? How to Train Your Dragon. Who?
- What dragon? How to Train Your Dragon. Is that right? Yeah. Yeah? Okay. Good. It's quite a few, isn't it? That wasn't on my list. I had Superman. Some people were disputing that. But it's John Connor in the Terminator movie.
- [2 : 1 0] There was a show... This is 1986, so a bit of what? Eddie Murphy and the Golden Child. And then, I don't know whether Neo was actually ever a baby, but Neo in The Matrix, he was the one.
- Okay? Neo is, you know, if you do it, it actually spells O-N-E. So, there's quite a few movies, isn't it? People, you know, movie makers love this theme of the destiny, the child of destiny coming, rising up to, you know, save the world or whatever.
- But, of course, as Christians, I mean, we know who the original chosen one is, isn't it? In fact, we know that he's the true chosen one, because he was a real person, not a person in a movie.
- And he really did save the world. Now, those of us who have been coming in December, we have been looking at Luke. And so, we're familiar with the first chapters of Luke's Gospel, where Luke tries and he succeeds in showing that Jesus is God's chosen Messiah.

And Luke records for us how the events in Jesus' life prove that he's God's chosen king, sent to save his people. And God did this in a number of ways.

[3 : 18] First, he did this by sending his angels to foretell the miraculous birth, not just of Jesus, but of John the Baptist as well. And then secondly, God also ensures that Jesus' birth fulfills many of the promises in the Old Testament.

So, for instance, Jesus has an earthly father from the royal line of David, as prophesied. He's born in Bethlehem, where a ruler will come from, according to Micah, the prophet. And Luke records all these carefully, as a well-researched historian would do, to give us confidence that Jesus is indeed the Messiah, the chosen one that Israel has been waiting for.

Well, Luke isn't done just yet, because he continues in this same vein in our passage today. This time, the events take place in the temple in the weeks following Jesus' birth.

So, there are three things that's in your outline that I want to focus on today to show how Jesus is still destined as that child. So, first, let's consider Mary and Joseph's actions.

They're the parents who obey God's word or God's law. So, we read from verse 21 in your Bibles, if you look, on the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise the child, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived.

[4 : 33] When the time came for the purification rites required by the law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord, as it is written in the law of the Lord, every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord, and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the law of the Lord, a pair of doves or two young pigeons.

Now, Luke here records three ways that Mary and Joseph obey the law. First, they circumcise Jesus on the eighth day, just as the law required. Second, they purify themselves, that's both Mary and Joseph, according to Moses' law.

Now, this is because a woman, according to the law, is said to be unclean, in ceremony unclean, after she has given birth, because of the blood and all that.

And so, after 40 days, what was required of her was to present herself at the temple and offer sacrifices to cleanse herself ceremonially. But third, they are also to bring Jesus to the temple.

Why? Because Mary, Jesus was Mary's firstborn. And so, according to the law, he belonged to the Lord. That quote there in verse 23 comes from Exodus chapter 13, and we'll actually come back to that in a while.

[5 : 50] Now, all this is actually done while Jesus is a passive baby, right? It's actually Mary and Joseph that are the obedient ones. And Luke actually reiterates that in verse 39, that Mary and Joseph did all that is required by the law.

So, why does Luke highlight all this? After all, their actions actually are not that unique or outstanding. Most Jewish parents would have done exactly what they did.

Well, I believe it's to show that even Jesus wasn't above the law. Jesus, the Son of God, divine, he was subject to the law in every way. And he did that so that he could become a true Israelite, a rightful heir of Abraham, and part of God's covenant family.

Luke wants to show that because Jesus fulfills all the law, that he's then able to become a substitute for Israel, and bring all that God had in mind for Israel to pass.

Now, the consecration of the firstborn also brings to mind another key point. And as I said, that law comes from Exodus 13. And so, I want to just go back to Exodus 13, because there we're told the purpose of that law.

[7 : 03] I put the verses up on the screen, but we're going to look at verses 14 to 16. Can you see the reason there for that law? It's a reminder, isn't it, of the Exodus.

Every time there's a firstborn male, and he's brought to the temple for dedication, it was to help them to remember how God had redeemed them from slavery all the way back in Egypt.

And I think that by raising it here, Luke is drawing a parallel between Jesus and the Exodus. You see, Jesus too, in time to come, will actually redeem Israel from slavery.

Except it will be a slavery of a different kind. It will be a slavery from sin. He will free them or redeem them from their slavery to sin. Luke actually sees Jesus' redemption as a new Exodus.

And that's why when he recounts, for example, Jesus' transfiguration in Luke 9 and 31, I've got the verse up there, Moses and Elijah appear with Jesus, and they spoke about his departure, which he's about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem.

[8 : 13] That word departure is literally Exodus in the Greek. Jesus' death on the cross is a new Exodus, because it frees Israel, and it frees all of us actually, from our slavery to sin.

Now, this way of speaking may seem odd at first, but actually we do it all the time too. We do it to show recurring patterns in history. So, for example, the word originally for Holocaust referred to the extermination of 6 million Jews in World War II by the Nazis.

But nowadays, the term is also used to describe any slaughter or genocide on a mass scale. So, we hear things like nuclear holocaust, used to talk about the threat of nuclear war, or people talk about the hidden holocaust in the US, referring to the many abortions that happen in the US.

I'll take another example, the phrase, the Great Recession. That was coined to describe the period of the GFC, right? But it's actually an allusion to the Great Depression in the 1930s, because both of them have very similar parallels, in terms of causes, in terms of the way the stock market crashed, and then the high levels of unemployment that followed afterwards.

And so, the idea of the Exodus works the same way with Israel. It was their defining moment in history. This was when God spectacularly intervened in their nation and freed them from slavery.

[9 : 37] It's a bit like talking to Australians and speaking of Gallipoli, or with the Americans, talking about their war of independence, or, you know, the Civil War, or with the Chinese Mao Zedong's Long March.

Or maybe only if you're a Communist Party member, maybe. I don't know. But with Israel, it was the same kind of thing. So, when Israel finds itself in exile again, many years later, this time enslaved in Babylon, they began to think in terms of a second exodus.

And so, some thought, when they finally returned from exile, physically, that actually the second exodus had occurred. But there were those that were a bit more astute, spiritually astute among them, that realized that actually, no, they were still in exile.

Why? Because Jerusalem was still under occupation. They didn't have a king of their own. And so, we move to our second point, where we had people like Simeon and Anna, two people who waited for the second exodus.

So, we read in the passage that both were devout Jews. They were coming to the temple, praying and fasting for Israel's freedom. I sort of imagine a bit like Richmond supporters, waiting for their next grand final win, you know, whenever that would come, patiently.

[11 : 00] Eighty-four years, it says, for Anna. Anyway. So, in verse 25, we see that Simeon was waiting, what? For the consolation of Israel. That word consolation means comfort or relief.

And Anna, the prophetess, well, in verse 39, she's looking forward to the redemption of Israel. Again, the word Jerusalem here is actually synonymous with Israel.

It's like saying, you know, like in last week, Moscow chose not to retaliate against Washington's actions, right? Regarding the expulsion of the diplomats. We're not talking about this Moscow, we're talking about Russia, and not just Washington, but the U.S.

So, Jerusalem here symbolized Israel. Now, all these hopes of Simeon and Anna and all these others, they were actually based on Old Testament prophecies.

And that's why when we read in verses 29 to 32, Simeon finally prophesying, when he sees Jesus the Messiah, is filled with lots of references or allusions to the Old Testament.

[12 : 00] So, look at those verses with me. It says, Now, some of you are doing that course, understanding your Bible with me at the moment, and this is an example of an intertextual link.

We've already seen one earlier with Exodus 13. And so, when we find such a link in our passages, then what we should do is actually go back to that passage to help us understand this passage in Luke more fully.

So, we're going to do that, but that passage was already actually read to us today. It was our Old Testament reading. Incidentally, that's why we have two readings each Sunday. One from the passage we're going to preach from, and the other from the Old Testament, to show these links and to help us appreciate, actually, the unity of the Bible, how the Old and the New Testament hang together.

And to realize that, although it's 66 books with many human authors writing hundreds of years apart, that really there's only one divine author, God, and he brings unity to everything in the Bible.

Anyway, that aside, let's look back at Isaiah 49, verse 1 to 7, shall we? So, put your finger at Luke and turn back with me to page 730. It's quite an intriguing passage, actually.

[13 : 30] So, page 730, verse 1 is on 730, and then 731 is the rest of the verses. But I want you to look at verse 6 for a moment. It says there, he says, Can you hear those allusions that are in Simeon's prophecy?

It's not a direct quote, but phrases like, light to the Gentiles, restoring the tribes of Israel, restoring to glory the tribes of Israel. It's a clear reference to this passage.

Now, if you read the rest of the seven verses, what we realize is that this is actually a song about the servant, the servant of Isaiah. He's mentioned four times in that passage, verse 3, verse 5, verse 6, and verse 7.

And this servant, this humble figure in Isaiah, is someone that's chosen by God. He suffers for his people. He's despised by the rulers and nations. In fact, if you look at verse 1, we see that actually the servant is actually a child of destiny too.

It's quite amazing, isn't it? Verse 1, Before I was born, the Lord called me. From my mother's womb, he has spoken my name. And do you recall from last week in Luke chapter 2 or chapter 1?

[14 : 54] It's exactly what happened with Jesus, isn't it? When the angel appeared to Mary and gave her the name of her child, he spoke Jesus' name, even while Jesus was in the womb of Mary.

And so Jesus is not only the Messiah, he's also the servant of Isaiah. But come back to Luke with me, and I want you to notice the distinction that Simeon makes between Israel and the Gentiles, and that's our third point.

Both in Isaiah 49 and with Simeon, there is this distinction between Israel and the Gentiles. Now why is that? Well, it's because the Jews of Israel were in a different position to the Gentiles.

It's true that all humanity needs God's salvation. It doesn't matter whether you're Jew or Gentile. But for the Jews, they already knew God. Ever since the time of Abraham, God had revealed himself to them.

He's even freed them from slavery in Egypt. So they had already tasted God's redemption once. What was supposed to then happen after they had experienced that redemption was for Israel to then become a light to the nations, as Isaiah 49 talks about, for God's glory to shine forth from them, and then as a result for them to draw nations to Jerusalem to worship God.

[16 : 21] But as we know in the Old Testament, that didn't happen, did it? Because they rejected God. They turned to idols over and over again until God had to exile them from the land. So now finally, in the New Testament, God sends his son Jesus.

He sends him to do what Israel failed to do. That's why Luke makes it a point to say that Jesus was obedient, even on behalf of what his parents has done on his behalf.

Because Jesus obeyed every single one of God's law, he's able to fulfill the role of the suffering servant completely. He's able to take on Israel's judgment on himself.

And as a result, God's glorious salvation now shines through him after his death on the cross and his resurrection. Jesus has now taken the place of Israel.

He's now the new Israel, the true Israel. And he's the one that's drawing all nations and the Gentiles to himself to be saved. That's what Simeon is foreshadowing as he prophesied in verse 29 to 32.

[17 : 32] Now the Jews too can be saved, but they are saved only by coming to Christ themselves, by being united to Christ and then becoming part of that true Israel.

So that's the distinction between the Jews and the Gentiles. But all have to still come to Christ. And Christ is now the true Israel, the light that God's glory shines from.

Now there's one more twist in this passage and I think it's actually the climax in the passage. It's sandwiched right in the middle. It's in verses 33 to 35.

And this is what it says. Verse 33, The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about Jesus. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, This child is destined, child of destiny, this child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel and to be a sign that we be spoken against so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed and a sword will pierce your own soul too.

This child Jesus, Simeon says, will cause the falling and rising of many in Israel and he will be a sign against which the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed.

[18 : 50] In other words, what I think Simeon is saying is that Jesus is God's giant litmus test and each of our response to him, all of us, each one of us, will determine whether we rise or we fall.

Now, how many of you have done chemistry at school? Some? Yep. Okay. We're going to be doing a litmus test right now. Okay. So I need two volunteers, maybe one, just one volunteer.

I'm not going to put you on the spot. I just need you to put a few drops in. Okay. Come here, Andre. All right. So I've got two glasses of water there. I want you to put about six drops in each. Okay. Now, you might think it's the same water.

It's clear. Okay. You can use the teaspoons to stir it. I hope this works. Now, why don't you hold it up so that people can see. Can you see the difference in the colors?

Now, I've got a pH chart on the slide as well. There you go. So it says that if it turns yellow, then the pH is six or below, and it's acidic.

[20 : 06] The water there is acidic. The water there is acidic. And if it's 7.6 or above, the water is alkaline or blue. Now, here's the thing.

The drops that I've just put into these two glasses, they're from the same bottle. There's no difference to the solution. And yet the water in each glass turned a different color. Why? Because it's the pH of the water that is different.

They have both reacted or responded differently to the drops, even though the water looked the same at first. This is what Simeon says that Jesus will be like.

Jesus' light shines the same on all of us. His word, to me, is no different to you. It's the same word that we're reading right now. It was the same death that he died on the cross for all of us.

And yet, whether Jesus saves us, that is, cause us to rise, or his death comes back to haunt us at the end, what Simeon calls falling, will depend solely on our response to Jesus.

[21 : 11] So is Jesus coming a good thing or a bad thing? It all depends on how we respond, isn't it? Simeon then adds another extra verse.

He says that our response further reveals the innermost thoughts of our hearts. Jesus is the one to whom our response will reveal our hearts.

Once we've heard of Jesus, once we've come to grips with how he's revealed in God's word, the way we respond actually shows what is in our hearts.

Our true intentions and our motives are laid bare, as it were, by how we respond. So we may initially think that when we first encounter Jesus, that we're actually coming and assessing Jesus to see whether we're going to follow him or not.

Is he worth it or not? But actually, the reverse is happening. Just like those drops of the pH solution, our response to Jesus isn't an assessment of Jesus or God.

[22 : 16] No, it's actually assessment of our own selves, of our own character. Our response, for example, may show that we are too proud to accept the need for a Savior, for Jesus.

Or it may show that we're too afraid to trust in his authority over us. Or it may reveal a true faith in his salvation. And so I guess the question that comes out from this passage is this.

How are we responding to Jesus and his words? And what does that reveal about our innermost thoughts? Now, nobody ever responds to Jesus as an evil man.

I don't know anyone who's told me that they think Jesus is evil. Even if they don't believe in him, they'll say that he's a good man or a wise teacher. But as many of you would know, unfortunately, as C.S. Lewis has famously said, those are not possible options.

Why? Because Jesus himself claims to be the Son of God. He's the Lord and ruler of our lives. And so if we refuse to accept him as Lord, then we must either think he's a liar because he claims to be Lord when he knows he isn't, or else he's deluded because he doesn't even know that he's lying.

[23 : 34] But to settle for him as just a good teacher or a wise man is not good enough. It's not an option that he gives us. Now, many of us, when we hear that, we sort of require because we don't want absolute rulers in our lives.

No. And by and large, that's a good thing. I'm really thankful that I live in Australia in a liberal democracy. I just have to look at North Korea, for example, and think, thank God I don't live there.

But the reason why we do that is because absolute human rulers or dictators are always selfish and evil. They actually don't care for us. They don't rule for our good.

And even if they did, they're not perfect. They make mistakes. But that's not the case at all with Jesus. Jesus is the ultimate servant king.

He rules not only with our best interests at heart. No. He actually gave up his very own life for us. He died for us so that he could redeem us from sin.

[24 : 40] Now, of course, I don't mean by that that means we can do whatever we want. No. Because we've got to remember we are selfish too. We're actually our own dictators, as it were. We're actually, if we are ruling our own lives, we're ruling it against our own best interests.

And we don't realize that actually the best thing for us, the thing that gives us most joy and fulfillment, is when we actually live for God, the one who created us.

Well, friends, it's New Year today, first day of the year. And for many of us, it's the time for New Year resolutions and goals, a time to find direction and purpose in life. Well, I just want to encourage you that apart from all the other goals that you may have in life, I want to encourage you to take this opportunity today, over this coming week, to take stock and to decide how will you respond to Jesus this year?

How will you react to his words and commands? For example, when he says, seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

How will you respond to that? It's one thing to say we follow Jesus, but actually, it's our choices and actions that really reveal what's in our hearts.

[25 : 58] We can say we trust Jesus when we come on Sunday, but if through the week we're seeking our own careers, we're always comparing with others and wondering why we're missing out on this or that, then we're not really trusting Jesus in that promise, is it?

To seek first, and he will add. We're actually saying with our actions that he's a liar, or that he doesn't really care enough for us, or that he's not powerful enough to follow through on his commands.

But either way, our choices reflect our hearts. We may not reject Jesus outright, but with our actions, we're saying something else. We're saying that we know better than him, that we're able to rule in our own lives more than him.

Or if we're listening to other people, whether it's family or friends, then we're saying that they know better than God. But friends, Jesus has already given his life to redeem us.

He created us. He's the one that knows what's best for us. And he wants us to follow him because that's what's in our best interest. So let's not doubt his goodness.

[27 : 04] Let's cling to his promise. Let's trust exactly what he says so that he may rule in our lives. So let's make Jesus and his words a thing of great blessing for us this year.

Something that will cause us to rise. Let us respond in total faith and trust in him. Why don't you pray with me as we do that? Father, we thank you that you've sent your son Jesus to free us from slavery to sin.

That we are no longer under your judgment if we put our trust in you. And what's more that we're given the spirit to live for you and not to live in a selfish way that goes against actually our best interest, goes against how we are created.

Father, as we come to this new year and as we read your word, as we come each Sunday, as we hear your word and hear the person of Jesus being revealed, help us to respond in the right way.

Help us to respond in faith. Give us the strength. Help us to look to Jesus and see that because of all that he's done for us, he's an absolutely trustworthy servant king.

[28 : 23] We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.