

Great Expectations: Simeon and Anna

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Date: 31 December 2017

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning, everyone. I hope you were listening because that was the first third of my sermon. That was for you as much as it was for the kids, so I hope you were listening. To be honest, we could probably stop right there and it would be a good word, I hope.

But I think it would be very helpful if we opened our Bibles to Luke chapter 2, 21 to 40, and just continued looking at this for a few more minutes. And I really just want to focus on three verses. If you have it open, I want to focus on verses, the bottom of the right side, page 857, verses 33 to 35.

I'm going to read them again for us, just so they're fresh in our mind. And Jesus' father and his mother marveled at what was said about him.

And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, I was chatting with a couple of dads this month of December, and they were telling me about their local public school Christmas concerts.

[1 : 26] Excuse me, did I say Christmas? I meant holiday concerts, which featured Kwanzaa, Hanukkah, Diwali, the winter solstice, Santa Claus, but there was no mention of Christmas at all.

And absolutely no mention of Jesus or the Christmas story. And it seems a little bit strange, though, doesn't it? Because if we live in a truly pluralistic and inclusive and multicultural city, and you just see the Christmas story as just another one of the great myths from history, what's the harm in including the baby Jesus in your Christmas, your holiday pageant blender, right?

What could be the harm of that? But here in verses 33 to 35, we actually discover, Simeon tells us why we regularly see this strange double standard in our culture when it comes to Jesus.

Why are people so allergic to the word Jesus? He says, In other words, there is something about the gospel of Jesus Christ that is different than all those other holiday celebrations.

It is that the person of Jesus and the message of the gospel confront us with an uncomfortable reality that demands a response. So that when you hear Jesus' words and you see his actions here in the pages of Scripture, it is not possible, therefore, to remain neutral and just simply sit on the fence.

[3 : 08] That's what Simeon's declaring here. So I want to take a closer look at the two responses that he says Jesus elicits. He says that for some it's falling, those who fall, and for others it will be rising, those who rise.

Let's look at these verses under those two headings, those who fall and those who rise. First, those who fall. And the first question is, what does it mean to fall?

The word that Simeon uses here, it means to crash down or to collapse. And it's used by Jesus in that famous parable of the two builders and the one who builds a house on sand.

And Jesus says when his house is finished, the storm comes, and the house collapsed and great was its fall. That's the same word here. So let me suggest two possible responses to the gospel that can lead to this sort of collapse, this type of falling.

And the first is for those of us who are well-educated, who are intelligent, who are successful in school and business and popular with our peers, those who are self-sufficient and upwardly mobile, maybe even those who are now comfortably retired.

[4 : 27] For men and women like this, the gospel can appear as foolishness. It's a helpless baby born in a manger and a poor Jewish carpenter preaching beside a lake.

It's a naked man nailed to a cross. It seems sentimental and unsophisticated. There's nothing witty or clever in Jesus' message that the first will be last and the last first.

In his message that we must receive the gospel like a child in order to enter the kingdom of God.

But when we dismiss the gospel as foolishness, we're shouting, I'm not impressed by this so-called savior.

I don't need a rescuer. Instead, we build our lives on the achievements and the successes and the legacy and the inheritance and the family and the reputation that we build.

We build our best life possible. But the result of rejecting Jesus is our falling, Simeon tells us.

[5 : 35] Our falling. In the final verdict of God, the house comes crashing down. And there's a second possible response that can also lead to falling. It's a surprising group, a very different group than that first one.

It is those who are devout, who are religious, who are hardworking and self-righteous. Those who are well-read and spiritual, who volunteer extra long hours at church, who are charitable with their hard-earned dollars.

For men and women like this, the gospel, we're told, can be a stumbling block. The gospel says, you're more sinful than you could ever dare imagine, and yet you're more loved and accepted than you can ever dare hope.

That's Tim Keller, by the way. You're more sinful than you could ever dare imagine, and you're more loved and accepted than you could ever dare hope, at the very same time. But those in this group, they stumble over the need for a Savior, and we shout, I don't need a Savior, I can rescue myself, thank you very much.

We build our lives on good deeds, and public praise, and obedient children, serving at church, and arousing eulogy to end it all. Again, we build our best life possible, but the result of rejecting Jesus is ultimately our falling.

[7 : 07] In the final verdict of God, the house comes crashing down. So we're talking about responses to Jesus, and there are others that we don't have time for.

But we've examined two, seeing Jesus and his message as foolishness, or as a stumbling block.

And either way, you can passionately reject him, or you can just ignore him completely.

The result is the same. There is, however, another response. So let's look secondly at those who rise. Those who are rising. And this word, rising, in verse 34, it's a resurrection word.

All through the New Testament, whenever you see this word, rising, it's a resurrection word. It's the same word Jesus uses when he says in John's Gospel, I am the resurrection and the life. When a person meets Jesus and puts their whole trust in him and his saving work on the cross, there is a great rising up which takes place.

A new life which Christ begins to transform and renew, and it spills over into all of daily life, into family, into work, into leisure. So that for those who seek Jesus in repentance and faith, he is not a stumbling block.

[8 : 25] But rather, he's the rock on which we build our lives. And friends, the good news of the Gospel is that for those of you who find in the Bible foolishness and archaic ideas, and you stumble over the idea of God dying on the cross, or you stumble over the idea of a very imperfect church, whatever it is, that it is possible, even today, to go from falling to rising.

And Simeon alludes that when we make this great move from falling to rising, there are two great blessings that come. There are two great blessings that come.

And he sings about them in verses 29 to 32. In verse 29, you can see it if you turn the page back.

He sings about gospel peace. Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace.

And there's no greater gift than peace, really, is there? And it's not peace and quiet. It's peace, which means love. It's the peace of restored relationship, which wipes away all guilt and shame, mending the penalty in the prison caused by sin.

And then secondly, he speaks of gospel unity. Unity in verses 30 to 32. He says, 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.

[10 : 01] Very simply, he's saying Jesus, the Savior, offers rescue to all people of every nation and every race and every language and every age.

that that it's his great purpose even that he would use his people to spread the gospel, to make that light travel to the ends of the earth through you and I.

This is a central theme of the gospel. And if you want to have a dig deeper into this later this week or today, just have a look at Paul's sermon in Acts 13. It's a great place to start on this great theme. But we, however, have to wrap up. So as we close, there's really only two questions for us. What do you see when you look at Jesus?

And how will you respond? What do you see and how will you respond? And it is possible, you know, to have been a Christian for a very long time and wake up one day and look at the story of Simeon holding the baby Jesus.

[11 : 13] And your sense of wonder in that story is vanished. And you find yourself no longer seeing a savior there, but kind of wondering, isn't there more to this than just a helpless baby?

Isn't there some deeper knowledge that I can discover? Is the gospel really this simplistic? Is there really nothing more I need to do?

You find yourself wanting more. So the question is, do you see a helpless baby here in Simeon's arms? Do you see a hopeless savior naked when you look at the cross who can't even save himself?

Do you hear the gospel and it sounds foolish and irrelevant? Oh my goodness, thank you, Daniel. Just give me one more minute here, bud. You'll be the first one, I promise. You got great timing, by the way.

I mean, do you hear the gospel and it just sounds foolish and irrelevant? Do you stumble over a rescue plan that doesn't seem to care how holy you are? Or, do you see the savior in Simeon's arms?

[12 : 21] Can you rejoice in the humility of the child born in the manger? Can you rejoice in a son raised by a carpenter, suffering and dying for your sake so that you can rise up with him into new life and become part of a family made up of brothers and sisters from all over the world who trust in Jesus?

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.