

We Need Peace in Conflict

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- [0 : 0 0] Good morning, everyone. Today, as Debbie mentioned, is the last Sunday of the year. It's the last Sunday of the decade, the end of this 10-year period.
- And as we start a new year, we're often thinking about New Year's resolutions. You know, I want to be reading the Bible more. I want to get healthy. I want to lose weight. I want to get a new job.
- But before we can get to our New Year's resolutions, I believe it's important for us to end the year well. Not only that, but let's end this decade well.
- I'm not sure for you, but the last 10 years has brought a number of different joys and pains for us. I've lost a number of family members.
- But there's also been significant joys. In the last 10 years for us, I finished full-time work. I went and became a full-time student at Moore College. I started at St. Paul's. I left St. Paul's.
- [1 : 1 1] I worked somewhere and then I came back to St. Paul's. We have had three children in 10 years. Much has happened in that period of time.
- Now, as we start looking at a new year and a new decade, we can be thinking about all those things we want to achieve. But we actually need to deal with this year first.
- And all the baggage that it brings. There's no point setting your sights really high on a new year if you're dragging 10 years worth of baggage and pain and hurt and sin behind you.
- Thinking that everything will change just because we've got a new calendar doesn't really make any sense. And thinking that we'll just have a better relationship with God because I'm going to try harder for a January run doesn't necessarily make sense either.
- We need to be dealing with the baggage that we have at this point to be able to go forward growing and following Jesus. In a different time, an era was marked.
- [2 : 1 9] When Jesus was born, it has changed everything in our world. So much so that our entire calendars function around when he was born.
- But when Jesus was born, it's not just a matter of time being changed, but of salvation. God became man. And this world will never be the same again.
- And so today, as we head to the end of the year and the end of the decade, we're going to see how two people respond when they meet this baby Jesus. These two prophets, they're also going to challenge how we come before Jesus and how he is preparing us for the next 10 years.
- We meet these two characters, Anna and Simeon, and they're at the temple. Jesus' parents had taken him to the temple to obey the law.
- Please have your Bibles open with me. We're in Luke chapter 2, finishing our series, looking at the infancy narrative. This is the end of the stories about Jesus as a baby.
- [3 : 2 5] He's eight days old at this point, and we're in verse 22 of chapter 2. 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.

The law stated that there were purification ceremonies that needed to happen after birth. And here they come and they offer birds to be sacrificed for their corruption and sin.

After birth, Mary would have been ritually unclean. But the focus is not on Mary here, but it is on Jesus. And yet it seems strange that Jesus would need to be purified.

He was born without blemish or spot. He doesn't need the death of birds to keep him in relationship with God. He has no sin that needs to be forgiven.

[4 : 36] And he's been with God for eternity. And yet here, just like when Jesus is baptized, he is identifying with us. And it's a reminder of how contagious sin is.

We catch it from our mother and father in our birth. Jesus here, even at the age of eight days old, is directing us to God's grace.

The pollutions that we all come into the world with are going to be washed away because of the birth of Jesus, through the grace of God. And as they come into this temple to do this ceremony, they speak to two people, Anna the prophetess and Simeon.

Neither of these people have official roles. They're not the Pharisee. They're not the Sadducee. They're not the high priest in the temple. They're both described as old.

And culturally, that means that they're well-respected, reliable witnesses. And there's a certain completeness that comes from having both a male and a female witness to the fulfillment of Jesus.

[5 : 44] And so we're going to briefly look at Anna, who's at the end of the passage, and then come back and spend some more time on Simeon. Verse 36. There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel of the tribe of Asher.

She was very old. She had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage. And then was a widow until she was 84. Now, it's not exactly clear whether Anna was 84 years old or whether she had been a widow for 84 years.

But what is clear is this woman was a faithful follower of God. Verse 37. She never left the temple, but worshipped night and day, fasting and praying.

And she has finally seen what she has been fasting and praying for. Coming up to them at that very moment, verse 38, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

The redemption of Jerusalem. This is what she's been looking forward to. And she makes this public expression of gratitude. Gratitude. This is a wonderful picture of an old and frail woman who has been patiently waiting for the Lord.

[7 : 04] And she meets Jesus. And she goes off to all who are like her, looking for God to act. I think she is a wonderful challenge to us.

She was fasting and praying in the temple, waiting to see God act. Do we have that same kind of patience and persistence with God?

Fasting is a very helpful spiritual practice. I've fasted before. But what it helps someone to do is to focus on God and focus on your dependence on God.

It's a reminder that God is the one who sustains and feeds. It gives you more time, because you're not doing things like preparing food and cleaning up. It gives you more time to read the Bible, more time to pray.

When you feel hungry, you pray. And it's a wonderful discipline to do. Let me know if you'd like to find out more about the spiritual discipline of fasting.

- [8 : 06] And so Anna had been praying and fasting. And Luke says she never left the temple. Now, I'm not necessarily going to encourage you to come in here.
- You need to sit down in the front where Abby is. You need to be fasting and praying every day of the week. We don't need to go to a holy place anymore to do that.
- But at this time, that's what Anna is doing. She's been fasting and praying. And finally, after 84 years, God has answered her prayer.
- Now, I'm not sure what you're praying for. I'm not sure what God is putting on your heart to be praying for. But Anna is an encouragement for us to do two things.
- Firstly, to pray and keep praying, even when it's hard, even when our hearts give way. But also, that God does answer our prayers.
- [9 : 04] It might not be in our timing. But God does answer our prayers. It might not be a yes. It could be a yes. It could be a no. It could be a wait. And Anna certainly waited 84 years.
- But now she has seen Jesus. She has seen the redemption of Jerusalem. And what a huge prayer that is to ask. I want to see your redemption in this country.
- And she has gotten to see it. But even then, to wait another 30 odd years to see his crucifixion and resurrection. And even now, we are waiting to see Jesus return.
- So let me encourage you to pray like Anna. Pray with dependence on God brought about by fasting. And be saturated in God's Word as you do it.
- So that's Anna. What a wonderful encouragement to pray and to be dependent on God. And the second character we meet is a gentleman called Simeon. Verse 25. Now, there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout.
- [10 : 15] He was waiting for the consolation of Israel. And the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit, that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah.
- Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. It's really interesting here that in these three verses, it's mentioned three times that Simeon either has the Holy Spirit on him, or is moved by the Holy Spirit.
- This is in marked contrast to the entire Old Testament. The Holy Spirit came on people sparingly. But now, something has changed.
- Jesus has been born, and God is pouring out his Holy Spirit just as he promised to do. Not only is God with us, Emmanuel, in Jesus, but he is dwelling inside people in the Holy Spirit, in numbers that we just had not seen before.
- And Simeon, like Anna, is waiting on God. Waiting because he'd been promised that he would see God's Messiah. Simeon, he's waiting for this Messiah.
- [11 : 25] He's waiting for God's chosen one. Because faith in Jesus, it's the fulfillment of all of his hopes and expectations of his people. And there's this beautiful moment when Joseph and Mary bring Jesus in, and Simeon sees the baby Jesus.
- He meets him, and he sings the last of these songs in the infancy narratives. There's a number of songs all throughout these first two chapters. This is the last of the songs, the shortest of them, but it's still quite lovely.
- Verse 28. Simeon took him, that is Jesus, in his arms, and praised God, saying, Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace.
- For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.
- That's this lovely song. I kind of feel like I should be singing these songs, as we've been going through them. But you can write a melody for me for next year. But Simeon's emphasis is on God's timing.

[12 : 33] Now I can die. Now you may dismiss your servant in peace. Now, because everything has changed. Now a new era has begun.

Now, God, your story of salvation, I can see it unfolding. Simeon, he's a trusting servant, and God is a faithful master.

And Simeon can say, God, look, I'm ready to die now. I hand myself over to you, because I've seen your goodness, I have seen your salvation for my people, and for all of the world.

And then Simeon, full of the Holy Spirit, prophesies about the work of Jesus. Verse 34. Can you imagine being Mary at this point, hearing this?

Her little eight-day-old baby was going to cause people to rise and to fall, to cause a sword to pierce her heart, her soul.

[13 : 53] Simeon is saying that Jesus is going to be a tool of division. He would cause division amongst people, two different types of division. He would divide those who follow him and those who don't, and he would divide people's hearts so that their hearts would be revealed.

Jesus is going to come and divide people into those who follow and don't follow, and for those who follow, their very hearts are going to be divided and revealed. When we are confronted by Jesus, we can't remain neutral.

We can't have no opinion of him. He will either confront our need for God and lead us to faith in him, or we will push against Jesus and reject him.

Simeon's prophecy points to Jesus' dividing nature. He will split families, some believing, some not, brother against brother, sister against mother, because you can't remain neutral to Jesus.

He pierces to the very heart and reveals what is within. And when we are confronted with who we are, we can admit our fault and our need for God, or we can flee.

[15 : 15] Simeon says that Jesus has come so that the thoughts of many hearts would be revealed and a sword would pierce Mary's soul too. Now, the heart in the ancient world, that was the place where the thoughts and the feelings and the desires and the attitudes dwelt.

You know, it's fairly similar for us. We might think things, but we feel things. This is the location of our heart. Maybe we might even say in our gut, a little further down.

But in the ancient world, it was the heart where the thoughts and the feelings and the attitudes, the hidden things, were. And the Bible as a whole presents Jesus as the Word of God and the Word is like a sword.

So a little later in Hebrews, it says that the Word of God is, again, like a sword, sharper than any double-edged sword. It penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joint and marrow, and it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

Jesus is going to function like a double-edged sword. It's interesting that in Simeon's prophecy, he uses this idea of a sword piercing to the heart.

[16 : 35] Now, in the ancient world, in the Roman world in particular, there were two types of main swords that they used. They used a sword called the makara and the gladius.

The makara was a single-bladed hacking weapon. I have the Chinese version here because, you know, props are always good. So this is the Chinese dao.

So this, similar type of weapon to the makara, it's a good hacking weapon, okay? You know, think about a rider on the top of a horse hacking down. You don't need both sides to be sharp.

It has a single focus. And the other was the gladius. The gladius was a double-edged weapon. So this is the Chinese jen.

The gladius was shorter, but also double-edged. These weapons are used not for hacking, these are used for piercing. This tool was a much more delicate weapon.

[17 : 41] You don't hack because you'll break the blade. You try and pierce armor and go between the ribs to get to organs. That's the function of a double-edged weapon. That's what it does.

It's designed to pierce. So there's a nice little weapon lesson. Jesus, as the word of God, is the double-edged sword.

He's not a hacking tool. He comes to penetrate to our inmost being. He gets through all of our defenses that we have made.

The feelings of security in our job, our feelings of happiness in life that we have made, the idea that we're good people generally and God should love me and God should bless me.

He cuts through all of that to the heart and He judges our thoughts and our attitudes. Have you ever had that moment sitting in church or maybe reading the Bible at home thinking, He's talking to me right now.

[18 : 51] He's talking to me. Why is He picking on me out of all these people? When that happens, when we feel like the preacher or the Bible reading is targeting us, that is the word of God.

That is Jesus Himself piercing our defenses, cutting between them all and getting to our very soul. Simeon is prophesying that Jesus would come and He would cut people to the heart.

He would divide their very thoughts and feelings and attitudes and souls and when that mess is revealed, people will be divided.

I think our hearts can be like this plastic bottle. I've got lots of props today actually. I think our hearts can be like this plastic bottle.

There's a little bit of oil and mainly food dye in there. But I think this is what our hearts are like. All throughout the last decade in particular, it's been filled with all kinds of things.

[19 : 57] Sin, resentment, anger, sexual temptation, lust, frustration, frustration and pain because I didn't get the job, anger because I can't afford the house I want, lust is damaging my relationships with other people.

And as we look into the new year and to the new decade, we have a heart like this. And one of my favorite new sayings is new year, new me. Have you heard this saying? New year, new me.

And we think, oh, it's a new year. It'll be a new me. But we are carrying a heart that is like this. And what we do is we just think, oh, I'm just going to try really hard at the start of the year.

I'm going to give it a good shake. And this year's going to be totally different. Everything's going to be totally different. Look, I've tried really hard all throughout January and it's still the exact same.

And we wonder why when it comes to February, nothing has changed. What we need is a puncture wound. What we need is a sword to pierce us.

[21 : 07] I don't know. I don't want to damage one of my swords but I do have a Stanley knife. What we actually need is a sword to come in. Let's not make too much mess. We need a sword to come in and get the gunk out.

We actually need it to be released. Otherwise, we're just going to keep pretending that everything is fine.

We're going to keep pretending that we've got this rotten heart but we're going to ignore it and we're going to think, I can go into this new year and everything will change and I'm going to be the best Christian next year. We need that sword of Jesus.

Miami, you're looking very stressed there. We need that sword of Jesus to pierce our hearts and let the gunk, let the horrible sin out.

Jesus comes to pierce us. He is sharper than any double-edged sword. He comes to divide our hearts and our thoughts and our attitudes. Without that sword piercing us, we could trick ourselves into thinking that everything was fine but we actually need this so it reveals who we are but let me tell you what, this is not fun.

[22 : 22] You know, stabbing that bottle, you know, if that bottle could scream, it probably would have. A little while ago I had some sin pointed out to me and it was like a stab wound straight between the ribs.

It was really painful being confronted with what had been a hidden sin. A sin that had been filling up within me for years.

And I very much wanted to keep this sin hidden. It wasn't until it was pointed out and lanced like a boil, like a stab wound into a plastic bottle filled with food colouring, did the gunk start pouring out the secretiveness, the evasiveness.

But it took that initial stab wound and confrontation with what was inside. I need Jesus to keep piercing my soul, getting between my ribs, my armour that I set up to pretend that I'm actually a good guy so that I can be made more like Jesus.

God's work when it pierces causes a response. You can't stay indifferent to Jesus at that moment. You will either fall on your knees and repent for what is coming out or you're going to slap sticky tape on it.

[23 : 40] You're going to build bandages around yourself. You're going to build walls to try and protect yourself. But we don't need to protect ourselves because we have a God who has died to protect us.

As we come to the end of the decade, the 2010s are closing out, it is important to take a moment and stop, to spend some time doing business with God and seeing what our hearts are like and not just assuming that everything will be fine.

There's no point going into the 2020s with a heart full of arrogance and sin and sexual immorality and selfishness. Book some time over the next couple of days to do some business with God.

It's likely that a lot of us have time before Sydney kicks back in. I want to congratulate you all on remembering what day it was to come to church today.

It's often hard between Christmas and New Year's to remember what day it is. But it's likely that we've got a little bit of time. Go and spend some time with God. Ask him, God, pierce my soul.

[24 : 52] Let me know how I need to change. Ask for help from a friend. If you invite a friend, they will tell you. Ask God and ask your friend, God, what is the one biggest sin that I need to confront to leave in this decade before I start 2020?

take a look at your sin, own it and acknowledge that it's yours and that Jesus came to get rid of it so that we could have peace, trusting in him and peace with him because he loves us and he died for us.

Let me pray for us. with peace of him too