

Luke 2:21-40

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[0:00] I'll please turn up Luke chapter 2, page 857 if you're following in the black church Bibles. And as we look back over the last week or so, Luke chapter 2, O come, O come, O come, Emmanuel, that's verse 3.

Once in royal David's city, that's verse 4. Joy to the world, verse 10. Then, verse 14, that's hark the herald angels sing.

And verse 18, God rest ye merry gentlemen. Then what? The Savior has been born, but what happened next?

What followed that first Christmas day? It's certainly not just business as usual, is it? After all that we heard in the run-up and on the day of Christmas itself, it simply cannot be business as usual. And this morning I want us to read on. I want us to read the verses that follow the Christmas story to get a fuller picture of the Savior who has come. And also of the salvation that he has come to bring.

[1:14] And I hope what we'll see is that Jesus, the Jesus of Christmas, isn't somebody that we can pack up at the end of the season. He deserves our attention. He deserves our devotion.

He deserves our commitment all year round. We shouldn't pack him away with the decorations in January. And the first reason for that is, verses 21 to 24 of Luke chapter 2, we see, first of all, that he is a suitable Savior.

He's a suitable Savior. Every time there's a new government that comes in, our hopes get raised a little bit. Every time a new president comes into the White House, people get excited. And it's probably because we think, well, this time we might just, if we just might get the leader we need. This one, he might be the one. She might be the one. But that hope is always, always dashed. Every single time that hope is dashed because the same old problems associated with their humanity reemerge.

We discover, sometimes quickly, sometimes it takes a bit of time, but we discover that we're dealing with a sinful, broken, selfish person. A diminished person.

[2:24] A person who is not perfect. A person who has flaws and weaknesses. We're dealing with someone like us. It's whatever you think the big problem that we have in the world.

Whatever the biggest problems that you see around us, whether it's greed or lack of compassion or corruption or pride or whatever it is, when you see those things out there, when you see them in our leaders and those that are ruling over us, if you're prepared to be honest with yourself, you know that your own heart finds an expression of those things as well.

It's the same for us all. And the upshot of that is that we have a problem. And it's not just that our lives don't tend to work the way we want them to. It's not just that that makes us unhappy or vulnerable or whatever it might be.

It is that it breaks the relationship that we were designed to have with our maker. That's why no president or prime minister or pop icon or pope, for that matter, can put things right.

Because they, as human beings, cannot deal with the problem of sin. What we need is a leader. We need one who will come in perfect obedience to God and his law.

[3:35] And that is the point that Luke makes straight after the Christmas story in Luke chapter 2. Verse 21, can you see? At the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

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 or two young pigeons.

Why are we given that information? All the skies have burst open over the Christmas story with the birth of this little one, and then we get all of this information about details about law keeping. Jesus was circumcised according to the demands of the law. Verse 21, Mary and Joseph observed the requirement for purification following childbirth, demanded by the law. Verse 22, Jesus was then taken to the temple to be consecrated according to the law. Mary and Joseph offered sacrifices that were necessary at this time, and their humble sacrifice reflects their poverty. Mention of obedience to the law is made again in verse 27 and again in verse 39.

[4 : 55] In total, five times obedience to the law is mentioned. And the reason for that is that Luke is making the point that from the very start of his life, Jesus fulfilled the requirements of God's law.

Jesus belonged to God in obedience, and from the very beginning he met the righteous requirements of God's law. Now why make this point?

Well, because while yes, we are saved ultimately by Christ's death and resurrection, for his sacrifice to be satisfactory, he needed to be spotless.

He needed to show perfect obedience to the whole law of God. He needed to keep the will of God consistently the whole way through his life. God couldn't overlook his law.

God couldn't turn a blind eye to his law, the requirements that were established. If anyone would be saved, the law must be kept. But Jesus does that.

[5 : 56] He keeps the law for his people. He does it for us in our place. And here we see the beginning of the first steps of that process. This is absolutely vital.

If any one of us are going to be saved, that he did these things, and he shows himself here to be a suitable Savior. So when you look at the Lord Jesus Christ, and you see all of the requirements of the law being met, you celebrate because he has done that for you.

All of the requirements that needed to be met were met by him, even from his very first days. He is a suitable Savior. The second thing that Luke wants us to see here more substantial is that he is a global Savior.

A global Savior. Verses 31 and 32. All the way through the first chapters of Luke. If you know the gospel, we see and hear people singing about this baby. Verse 28.

Simeon is no different. Can you see? He has, verse 25, we're told, been waiting for God's Messiah. And by the prompting of the Holy Spirit, he comes to the temple on this day to discover that this baby is the one that he and God's people have been looking out for.

[7 : 08] And he can't stop himself. Look at verse 29. 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.

This old man is just delighted. He realizes that the baby here is the Messiah. And so he has seen with his own eyes God's salvation. And what is striking, what is new here, is the scope of the salvation that Jesus will bring.

There's been lots of celebrating, lots of singing over the Christmas story. But what is new here is the scope. Look at verse 31. It is a salvation for all peoples.

Verse 32. Gentiles, as well as Israelites, will be included. The questions of who's in and who's out permeate our culture at all kinds of levels.

You can be part of this group if you dress this way, but not that way. You can be part of us if you speak this way, but you're very definitely not one of us if you speak that way.

[8 : 19] You belong around here if you believe this creed and usually signal to others that you believe it, but you don't belong if you don't. And by believe, we mean endorse and celebrate and affirm.

And if you don't do those things, you very definitely don't belong. Who's in and who's out? In fact, this elitism gets pretty dark, actually, when you think about it, when it comes to the rights of the weak and the vulnerable.

In our society. The unborn. Or the disabled. Or now, the elderly, as well. The reason that you don't belong is because you're an inconvenience.

It's not like that with Jesus. The Savior that God has sent is a global Savior in the sense that all are invited to come to Him.

Well, what do we mean by all? Well, first of all, it's clear that it means all nations. Simeon's language here echoes Isaiah's prophecy in Isaiah 49 verse 6, where the Lord speaks to Israel

saying, It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel.

[9 : 29] I will make you as a light to the nations that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth. To the nations. To the end of the earth.

Israel will receive glory as the nation through whom the Messiah has come, but the rescue extends to the end of the earth. That's wonderful news.

And it's wonderful news for a start for us here this morning because it means that we have been included. When you look around the room here, do it now.

When you look around here each Lord's Day, we see so many nations represented. God had each of the countries represented in this room in mind when He said this through the mouth of Isaiah all those years ago.

All the nations. The end of the earth. So we're included and so we can celebrate. That is good news for us. But it is also the fact that the gospel that we preach is for every nation under the sun.

[10 : 34] And so you will never set your eyes on another human being to whom the offer of this salvation is not open. We cannot exhaust the scope of Jesus' reach.

Simeon looks at this baby and he sees the one who has come to bring salvation to the world. Now what that means, if you're here this morning and you're looking into the Christian faith and you're from, well, any one of the nations on the face of the earth, so that's you, if that's you, Jesus will not reject you on the basis of your ethnicity.

Wherever you've come from in the world, the offer of salvation through Jesus Christ is for you. All nations. Secondly, the all means all types.

All types. What do I mean by that? Well, Luke's account up to this point shines a light on the lives of a broad group of people. Do you notice that as, perhaps if you know Luke's gospel, but also if you've been in it through the Christmas period, we've got Zechariah and Elizabeth.

They're an older priestly couple. Mary and Joseph, the stars of the show in some ways up to this point, the poor, ordinary couple. The shepherds out on the hills, they're hardy, they're spiritual outsiders.

[11 : 58] And then Simeon here, the aging, devout God-fearer, and Anna, the elderly, widow, prophet. It's a broad group of people. They have one thing in common, that is that they come to see that Jesus is the Messiah and they praise God and worship Him.

But it is in their difference that we are to see how Jesus isn't just for all nations. He is for all types of people as well. Every type of person can receive the salvation that Jesus has come to bring.

Now those questions of who's in and who's out in our culture, they are so powerful and so influential. And it extends even further than that because the values that our culture holds about what is good and true and beautiful, well, our culture worships beauty and success.

Jesus came for the ordinary. Our culture loves to organize itself in tribes with people like us. Jesus came for the outsider. Our culture idolizes youth and rejects the elderly.

Jesus came for them both. Jesus is a Savior for all. Whoever you are, wherever you're from, whatever color your skin, whatever stage of life you're at, whatever you've done with your life up to now.

[13 : 20] If you put your faith in Jesus, He will rescue you from your sin. And He will reconcile you to the God who made you for Himself and who loves you and sent His Son to do this to bring this relationship into being.

Jesus is a Savior for all. Mary and Joseph marvel at this wonderful news. But Simeon then turns to Mary and verse 34 explains how this will happen.

Look at verse 34. Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel and for a sign that is opposed and a sword will pierce through your own soul also.

So the thoughts from many hearts may be revealed. Here is the first hint of the great suffering that Jesus would endure in order to accomplish this salvation.

This was unexpected, of course. The people expected that when their Messiah would come, when God's rescuing King would arrive, He would come in power and He would sweep aside the enemies and He would victoriously redeem His people.

[14 : 24] But here we see that something else is in store. That's not the plan. That's not what God is going to do. His Messiah will be spoken against as people take their stand against Him.

He will be mocked. He'll be despised. He'll be rejected. In the end, those who oppose Him will nail Him to a cross to die. At that point, as she stands at the foot of the cross, Mary, His mother, who looks at Him now, all small and wriggly, and Simeon's hands will experience the piercing of her own soul.

That's what He's saying here. But in that sadness, in that rejection, that mockery, that suffering, and ultimately that death, that is how this global salvation will be accomplished.

God's plan for His Messiah is that He will suffer and die for sinners. The crucifixion of Jesus Christ, it wasn't surprising. Here we're being told about it right at the beginning of Jesus' life.

It wasn't an unexpected thing that caught God off guard, but it is the fulfillment of God's global salvation plan. It will only be through the shed blood of Jesus.

[15 : 31] Revelation 5 tells us that He will purchase men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. Let me ask you this morning, have you received that salvation?

We've already seen that you fit the criteria. All nations and all people, you're in there somewhere. Have you put your faith in Him? You can do it now in your seat.

You can say in the quietness of your own heart, Lord Jesus, I realize that I've lived my life without You. I realize that You have come to save me. Please do that.

I turn from my sins and give my life to You. Let me encourage you to do that if you haven't yet done that in your life. Let me encourage you also, look again at verse 34. Don't fall into verse 34.

Do you see? Simeon's comment, it doesn't just point forward to the suffering that Jesus will endure. It also shows us that not everyone will accept the salvation that He offers. This child, verse 34, is appointed for the fall and rising of many 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.

[16 : 47] You see, when we talk about a Savior and particularly we talk about the problem from which men and women need to be saved, hearts are revealed.

The message invokes a response. When we talk about these things, some people laugh at the idea of needing salvation. They think, yes, I look at the world out there and I see that it's in a real mess. But the problem is dot, dot, dot, fill in the blank. It's the economy. It's education. It's some sort of political solution. Maybe if we just get a leg up, maybe give us a bit of wisdom, a bit of advice, that will sort it all out.

You remember the erstwhile Alan Partridge, when his television career hit the skids, he said to his beleaguered PA, who hinted that he might think about going to church, he said, I don't need salvation, Lynn.

I need a second series. Lots of us think like that. We think, actually, we don't need all your church stuff. We don't need Jesus. We don't need salvation.

[17 : 55] Christmas is lovely, of course. We do certain things around this time of year that are giving me the feel goods and so on. We don't need that. What I need is our own version of a second series.

Some laugh at the idea. Others find it offensive. Maybe that's you. The idea of somebody telling you that you are personally sinful before a holy God, well, that's too much for your sensibilities.

And, frankly, you think it's scandalous. How dare people say that to me? And so you walk away from Jesus. The truth is, when Jesus and his cross are mentioned, hearts are revealed.

Our true character is exposed. And that is the dividing line that runs all the way through history.

When Christ is mentioned, whether it's in the preaching at church or a conversation at your Christmas party or a boxing day when you get together with your friends or in any other kind of context where you mention the name of Jesus, there are always those who will reject him and reject his salvation, and there are those who humble themselves to receive it.

[19 : 14] But there is no middle ground. So let me ask you, what is your response? Are you for Jesus or are you against him?

It is no exaggeration to say that this is the defining question for every man or every woman who ever lives. Because what God will do with us for eternity rests on what we will do with Jesus.

So let me encourage you, come to him in repentance. Hold to him in faith and be drawn into the global salvation that he has come and is perfectly qualified to bring.

And let me show you, let's read on, let me show you where this will inevitably lead. Let's look one more time at these two saints in the temple, Simeon and Anna, because it is in their response that we see the nature of the salvation that Jesus brings.

If he is, first of all, a suitable savior, and secondly, a global savior, I want us to see thirdly and finally for a couple of moments, he brings a joyous salvation. A joyous salvation.

[20 : 27] Both Simeon in verse 25 and Anna in verse 38 are waiting for the consolation, the redemption of Israel. They are waiting for God's rescuing king to come.

And for Anna in particular, we get the impression that this has been a long and devoted wait. Look at verse 36. 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.

More literally, that reads, or then as a widow for 84 years. She did not depart from the temple, worshipping with fasting and prayer night and day.

Year after year, waiting and waiting and waiting. Waiting for God's promise of a rescuing king.

Waiting for the promise of a savior to come to pass. And now he's here.

And look how they respond. Simeon, verse 29, is overjoyed. Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation. He's saying, oh, I can die happy.

[21 : 28] I have seen Jesus. I need nothing more. It is the most exciting day of this man's life. It's the same with Anna, verse 38. 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.

She's praising God and she's saying, guys, he's here. He's here. Look, there he is. Our savior has come. And it's true with every single person in Luke's gospel from the beginning.

Since the very start of his gospel, he's drawn a straight line, a big, fat, straight line between identifying Jesus and being filled with joy. Elizabeth, Mary, Zechariah, you remember, he had a bit of a false start, but he got there eventually and now Simeon and Anna join in.

That is what happens for anyone who can see and embrace God's salvation. When someone grasps who Jesus Christ really is, the natural response should be joy.

And how much more for us here this morning? How much more for us than these saints of old?

Because we have even more to go on than they did. We don't merely look at a baby in hope, but we look back to an empty cross and an empty tomb, the fulfillment of all that Simeon and Anna were looking forward to.

[22 : 56] We can see that the baby wasn't just born at Christmas, but that he lived the life that we should have lived. He died the death that we deserved. He rose again to secure our salvation. Indeed, he ascended to heaven.

That wasn't a, even if that had happened, it would have been incredible, but he ascended to heaven and he has sent us his Holy Spirit who has come to live in us, the Spirit of Christ, and to assure us that we belong to him, that he holds us fast, and that he will get us home to glory.

What do you think you need in life? What do you think you need more than anything else? A sense of personal significance? Lots of us think that that's the answer.

You are loved by the God of all the earth. You have the approval and acceptance of the one who defines reality itself. Nothing else conveys significance like that.

Do you think you need a sense of purpose? That your life actually counts for something? Well, when you trust the Lord Jesus, nothing you do is meaningless because it can all be done for his pleasure.

[24 : 02] When you are in the Lord, your labor, whatever it is, whatever it is that you do, as long as it's not explicitly sinful, is not in vain. Whatever it is, it will be taken up and used in the purposes of God.

So much of us are looking for our lives to count. So much of us want to be significant. That instinct is normal and good and natural. Well, it only matters if you're in the Lord Jesus.

Otherwise, it's all been a waste. Do you think you need a helper? You're not interested in leaving a mark.

You're just simply interested in getting to the end. You just want to make it to the end of the week. Maybe you think, the thing I need more than anything is a helper to keep me from stumbling. One who will sustain me in this life.

One who will keep me from falling and when I fall will pick me up again. God gives all His children the Holy Spirit to live in us and to enable us to resist temptation, to live in a way that pleases Him, to keep going.

[25 : 08] And when we fail and when we fall, He picks us up and sets us on our feet again. What do you need? Maybe you need a secure future.

You think, everything's uncertain. How on earth am I going to secure the future? Well, in Christ you have an inheritance that won't perish or spoil or fade. It's an inheritance that God is keeping for you. And when your earthly race is run, even death, our greatest enemy, death, that thing that causes all of us to fear the most. It can't hold us in Christ. Even then, when we die physically, we step into the presence of God where there are pleasures forevermore for the rest of eternity.

If you want to secure your future, there's only one place to go. Here's the thing. Whatever you think you need, He has provided.

Whatever you think you need, significance, purpose, help, security, there's only one place that you can go.

[26 : 17] So go there. That is why it is a joyous salvation. Go to Christ. However hard life gets because of the Lord Jesus, those struggles will one day pass.

You have the resources to resist grumbling, to resist bitterness, to renounce it altogether, and to rejoice. So, can you see we have a suitable Savior, we have a global Savior, who brings us a joyous salvation.

Christ is for life, not just for Christmas. Hallelujah. What a Savior. Let's pray. Let's pray.