

Temple Presentation

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[0 : 00] As we were just saying, we're preaching through Luke's Gospel over the whole of 2008. This morning we're looking at Luke chapter 2, focusing on verses 21 to 35.

Please keep your Bible open in the passage as we go through it together. We've been looking so far at Luke's account as historical account based on eyewitnesses of Jesus' life.

We've seen so far Jesus build up to His birth. We've seen His birth. We now find Jesus as an infant being presented at the temple for circumcision.

We see what happens immediately after that with this man called Simeon. There are two sides of this passage that I want us to draw out.

You have them on the sheets with the sermon outline, which is that through Jesus, God works in ordinary life, and that through Jesus, God does the extra ordinary.

[1 : 05] So, first point here is that through Jesus, God works in ordinary life. We're in verses 21 to 24 here. On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise Him, He was named Jesus.

The name the angel had given Him before He had been conceived. This is ordinary life. This is real life. 2,000 years ago in a Jewish community, you have Jesus, a fully human baby, not a baby that is an apparition or anything like that, a human baby flesh and blood who cries, who needs fed, who's dependent on his parents, an ordinary baby in the fully human sense, going through the same experience as every other Jewish baby boy.

He is eight days old, so he gets circumcised, and he gets named Jesus. That kind of ordinary ritual that you would find with every Jewish boy who lived in the time and the era that Jesus lived in. His parents, as well, come across as very ordinary, as very human people you can relate to. After Jesus has been born, His mother is ceremonially unclean, according to Jewish law, for seven days. After that, there are 33 days that she has to wait before she can go to the temple to offer a purification sacrifice. This is His mother, Mary. She's very human, very normal.

[2 : 37] She goes through all the same rites of passage that every other Jewish woman would. She goes to offer her sacrifice, and what we see with how ordinary Mary and Joseph were is that they were poor financially. They didn't have much money.

The sacrifice that they give is said in the law of the Lord, a pair of dubs or two young pigeons. This is from Leviticus 12.

The normal sacrifice you offer would be a lamb and a dove. It says, if you're poor, if you cannot afford to give a lamb, you can give two dubs instead. It's a concession for people that don't have much money.

What do Mary and Joseph give? They give two dubs because they cannot afford to give a lamb.

You have this really ordinary experience of a normal couple, young, newly married, with their new baby son. They don't have much money. Joseph, the father, is a carpenter, struggling to make ends meet.

All his income is heavily taxed by the occupying Roman army, and you can picture them. The kind of couple, just young buying their food and the reduced to clear aisle, that's the kind of couple they were.

[3 : 51] They go to the temple with their desire to present their baby son, Jesus, to the Lord, to dedicate him to God, because they want his life to be devoted to serving God.

So, in so many respects, they are ordinary, young, newlyweds, new parents, not wealthy. They love God, they want their baby son to love God, and they dedicate him the firstborn son, the very best of what they have to God.

That's why we find them here at the temple. They're fulfilling what's written about them in the Old Testament law, that you should give God the first mouthful and not the dregs of everything, your

money, your crops, even your children, the way they approach it.

So, at this point, at the very beginning of the story of Jesus that we're going to be seeing over the next year, we see that the whole story is so rooted in normality, in real human life.

You know, this isn't some kind of bizarre fable. It's not like ancient Greek religion with its bizarre stories of the Pantheon and Medusa and snakes in her hair. This, our God, is a God who comes into normality and who inhabits it as someone that is fully human.

[5 : 10] Now, we're saying that, and it doesn't sound controversial maybe, that through Jesus God works in ordinary life, but a lot of Christians deny this. Maybe some of you even deny it, that God works through ordinary life, and that at a basic level God loves and embraces ordinary life, ordinary human life.

And some of you think and live as though God is only at work when the really supernatural stuff happens, as though normal life is somehow spinning along on its own, out of God's control, and God only intervenes sometimes, and it's only in the supernatural that God is at work.

And at the core of it, if you think like that, is that you do not like this idea that God is the God who loves and who is sovereign over ordinary stuff in life.

A couple of scenarios to illustrate this. Scenario one, the Marvin Andrews mentality. Marvin Andrews, he's a footballer and a Christian. He's a great guy. He is so open about his faith, and he works tirelessly to share the gospel with his teammates.

He used to play for Livingston and Rangers, and now he plays for Wraith Rovers. We totally commend him unreservedly for how unashamed he is of the gospel, and he can teach us huge lessons in that regard, for how evidently he loves Jesus, and God bless Marvin Andrews for that.

[6 : 44] A couple of years ago he had a really bad injury to his cruciate ligaments. It was potentially career-threatening injury, although it can be repaired by surgery, and a lot of footballers get this injury, and then they get the surgery, and a year later they're back playing.

But Marvin was really vocal in the press, saying that he would not get surgery, because he prayed to God, and God would heal him, and if he submitted to surgery it was a lack of faith, because God only works in the supernatural and he doesn't work through surgeons.

So that's what he said, and that's what he did. And amazingly he got through the rest of that season, but just before the World Cup, which he was going to be playing in with Trinidad and Tobago, his injury flared up, he ended up not playing.

And the question that you have to ask Marvin is, how can it be a lack of faith in God to have surgery, when the God who is sovereignly in control of everything, even the normal stuff in life, has sovereignly provided a surgeon who can answer your prayers and treat your injury?

You know, it's like you're in a burning building, and you pray to God, God save me, and then all of a sudden a fireman bursts through the door and says, come on, I'm going to get you out of here, I've got a ladder, and you say, no, because I've prayed to God, and God will save me.

[8 : 02] Couldn't it be that God who was in control of everything was in control of the fireman that came in who can take you out, and that he's answering your prayer through normal circumstances?

But, okay, there may not be that many of you who are influenced by that kind of theology and incencies, but there could be some of you, because we're a really diverse bunch. Even if you don't think that way, this rejection of God's involvement in normal life is still a problem for a lot of us, through scenario two, which is that I'm too spiritual to enjoy normal ordinary life mentality.

Some of you deny God's involvement in and fundamental love of ordinary life in a very subtle way, in a way that where you reject what God's doing in ordinary life, but you hide it in the guise of being deeply spiritual and serious.

It's where you take ordinary life with all of its ordinary stuff, but you make the ordinary this kind of inferior opponent to the spiritual, and you make the ordinary stuff a drudge that you either reject outright, or you grudgingly endure it, but you take no joy in life because the Christian way is seriousness.

And people who think like that, that they're too spiritual to either participate in or enjoy normal human life, they tend to have this dualistic outlook where your soul is good and your soul is pure, and that's what God is interested in, and that's what you cherish and you value and you put all your commitment into improving, but your body, the rest of your life, that's worldly and that's sinful, and you get this working itself out in a few ways.

[9 : 59] In the past, even in the present, unbelievably, you get Christians who go to crazy extremes, because I'm holy, I'm taking a vow of silence and I'm never going to say another word or

Speak to another person again.

You get people who do that and who say that and who have said that in the past, or because I'm holy, I'm going to spend the rest of my life standing on a pillar.

What's that? How is that reflecting the glory of God? How is that replicating the life of Jesus who was ordinary, who lived a fully human ordinary life?

In our context, a bit closer to home, that I'm too spiritual to enjoy ordinary life, it tends to manifest itself in a joyless approach to living as a Christian.

We've said, if you're a Christian, you cannot take part in a lot of aspects of normal life. We're only a generation or two away from the days when in parts of Scotland, if you were a professing Christian, you weren't allowed to take part in sports or to exercise, that's about the flesh and the body and that sinful and worldly and Christians are devoted to their souls.

[11 : 14] We have that kind of thinking where you take normal parts of ordinary life. Do you think that when Jesus was a child, he just sat on a stool all day and never ran around? We take parts of ordinary life that God approves of, that God created, and we've said they're out of bounds, and in the parts of ordinary life that you can inhabit, you have to do with a frown on your face and with absolute serious joylessness, because that's the Christian way.

That whole way of thinking, you don't find it in Jesus, you don't find it in Paul, you find it in the Greek philosopher Plato, the founder of dualism, and he was not a Christian, he's on the other team. He was the one that said the incorporeal, the soul, that's what's good and pure, but the material is awful, and you have to just endure it until you're dead and you don't have a body anymore.

But what Luke is doing here, and being so clear about the ordinary, normal human existence of Jesus, what he's being so clear about is that God works through normal, ordinary life, and he sets the tone for everything that follows in the rest of Luke's gospel.

Everything that you'll see over 2008 to be listened to these sermons, which is that in Jesus, you have the meeting place of the ordinary and the extraordinary.

In Jesus, you have the God-man, someone who's fully God and who is fully human. You have the one who, out of his beautiful mind, devised and created the universe in its infinite complexity and perfection, and that one who did that takes his day job as a carpenter, someone who takes pieces of wood and cuts them and sands them down and nails them together to make furniture.

[13 : 09] And there's no inconsistency between the two, between the Jesus who created the universe and Jesus the carpenter. He loves doing both things, ordinary and extraordinary.

And that's what we find, the same Jesus who made solar systems and galaxies and the earth with its ecosystem, who made your incredibly complex human physiology that he takes complete satisfaction in making tables and chairs from pieces of wood.

Jesus loves the ordinary and the extraordinary because God is in charge of both. That's the first thing we see, through Jesus, God works in ordinary life.

But then, second thing is that through Jesus, God does the extraordinary. We were focusing a minute ago on the fact that a lot of people, a lot of Christians deny that God works through ordinary means, but there are also a lot of people who deny that Jesus is extraordinary and that through Jesus, God does the extraordinary.

And really, the tone of our day, atheism is incredibly popular. This belief that if Jesus existed at all, that he was just a man. Theological liberals, again, are big on this idea that Jesus is not divine, the bones of Jesus, like somewhere in Palestine, he wasn't resurrected, you can kind of explain all of the miracles and that they were just bizarre coincidences.

[14 : 39] Theological liberals try and do that, other religions as well. If you go through all the other world religions, Jesus is not God. Even if he does some special stuff, you know, Mahatma Gandhi said, I cannot say that Jesus is any more divine than Muhammad or the Buddha.

So everywhere else you find people who deny that Jesus is extraordinary in the Christian sense, that he is the Son of God. But what you see here in this passage is that he is extraordinary and that through him, God does the extraordinary.

We're in verses 24 onwards. In verse 25, there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the constellation of Israel and the Holy Spirit was upon him.

The story continues here with yet more ordinary life. There's a man called Simeon. He's introduced to the story. We don't know that much about him. We know his name, a very common name in that

period, not a very common name now.

I've got a friend called Simeon and everyone else assists him on. Simon's misspelled here. He says, it's not Simon, it's Simeon. It's a really uncommon name now, but in that time there were loads of Simeons.

[15 : 53] We don't know his job as far as we know he doesn't have any title or important role in society. He was probably an old man. Looks like he was old from the passage.

He's quite unremarkable in a lot of ways. The story still looks ordinary, ordinary people. This is where you see God inject the extraordinary into the story.

Simeon was a believer. He had free grace righteousness. He had a good standing with God on the basis of the grace of his Savior. That's evident because he had righteousness, the grace he received.

It was turning itself into works of love, i.e. it says he was devout in his lifestyle. He had this long-lasting hope in what God was doing as Israel's Savior.

It's like what Paul says in Titus 2. We saw this at the prayer meeting a couple of weeks ago that a solid Christian needs to be in good health in terms of faith, love and endurance.

[16 : 54] On the right track in terms of the faith, what being a Christian is all about, what the gospel is, love in terms of the application of the gospel to your life and endurance, ongoing hope in the God of the gospel.

Simeon had all of these things. He had righteousness, it says. He had devout living. He had endurance. He had all of this going on because of the Holy Spirit's role in his life.

It says the Holy Spirit was upon him. Literally in the original Greek it says the Spirit was holy on him. God's Spirit was working on him in a way that was transforming his life, this ordinary old man with an extraordinary work of God going on in him.

And here is where you really start to see the ordinary and the extraordinary coming together because this ordinary old man has a revelation made to him by the Holy Spirit that before he dies he is going to see the Lord Christ.

It's in verse 26. What does that mean? Christ is a Greek term. It's Hebrew equivalent is Messiah. And those words both signify the special person whose very being and life is full of God's favour and love.

[18 : 15] The person that God has chosen to serve and act as the deliverer and saviour and king of his people.

So in Simeon's mindset the Holy Spirit has promised him that he will meet the most important person in the history of the world before he dies.

He's going to meet the one person who is like no other. We're not talking about meeting some beelist pseudo-celebrity. I've met a few of those at my lifetime and they're a profound disappointment.

But meeting Jesus is so incomparably different. And that's what Simeon has promised, this meeting like no other because he's going to meet the Messiah before he dies.

And then in verse 27 it says, moved by the Spirit he went into the temple courts and that's where he met Jesus. The Holy Spirit directs Simeon. We don't know where he was before that. Probably some were very normal doing something very ordinary.

[19 : 18] Imagine you're Simeon, you're this old man who's sitting there at home in your armchair and all of a sudden the Holy Spirit starts directing you, telling you get to the temple because you're about to meet him.

And there are some of you who are getting that same calling this morning from the Holy Spirit working through the word saying, come on, this is your chance to meet Jesus.

You were sitting at home eating a bowl of cornflakes an hour ago and now the Holy Spirit is beckoning you to come and meet the Messiah, the King of the Universe.

And what happens next is breathtaking because Simeon gets to perform the act of dedication to dedicate the Lord's Christ to the Lord.

In verses 28 onwards, Simeon took him in his arms and he praised God saying, Sovereign Lord as you have promised, you now dismiss your servants in peace for my eyes have seen your salvation which you prepared in the sight of all people.

[20 : 21] A light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel. Look at the extraordinary things God is doing through Jesus. A, Jesus is the Christ.

In Jesus, God is living up to all of his promises to redeem his people. He's God's anointed one. He's God's beloved. He's the one that God chose to be redeemer. B, Jesus is God's salvation. By that it doesn't mean say that he's God's salvation that God needs saved. It's the complete opposite. It's that we need to be saved and that Jesus is God's plan embodied to save us. So we see that, that Jesus is God's salvation. That in the incarnation, in the Son of God made incarnate, in Mary's womb being born as a fully human baby, he is God's answer to the problem of sin.

See, Jesus is a light of revelation to the Gentiles. What's the significance of that? Well remember, up until this point, throughout the Bible, throughout the history of what God has been doing, he's been primarily working in one nation, the nation of Israel.

[21 : 30] He's been specially revealing himself to them throughout the Old Testament. He gave them the task of being one nation that's a blessing to all the other nations. But they've been completely failing to live up to that because they've been navel gazing and forgetting the Gospel and wondering from God.

But so far in the history of salvation, specific revealed truth about God has only been known and held by one nation. Only to the Jews. And the rest of the world, we only know as much as the Israelites would tell them.

So that means that for the rest of us who weren't Jews at that point, we were stuck. But the thing is that this through Jesus is all going to change because Jesus is going to change the world. He'll be a light of revelation, not just to Israel, but to all the Gentiles, everyone else in the world. And this has happened because look at us.

We are not ethnic Israelite Jews, and yet God has been revealed to us in Jesus. So we praise God and thank God for that. We know who God is because of Jesus, because he's been a light of revelation to the rest of the world.

[22 : 43] And that is us. D, Jesus is glory for Israel, it says. Now, Mary and Joseph are hearing this from Simeon, and it's a radical departure from the whole culture that they live in, which is all the arrows point inwards toward Israel.

And now they're being told, through your son, all the arrows are going to point outwards to the rest of the world. So does that mean that Jesus has bad news for Israel? Is he going to take away from Israel? But what Simeon says is no way, not at all.

He is a blessing to the rest of the world, and he's glory for Israel. Your son will make Israel a better place. He'll make the whole world a better place to be, and that includes Israel.

In response to this, in verse 33, the child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him. This is quite big news for young parents with their new baby.

They'd heard amazing stuff about him, that he'd be a savior to his people. And yet what they're told makes them marvel, because you know, they're just a normal, poor, young couple, and yet they're told, your son is going to change the entire world.

[23 : 52] And then after that, Simeon, he tells them even more extraordinary things about what God is going to do through Jesus. They knew before he would be the savior to his people, but what's spelled out here is world domination.

He won't be great parochial-y. He will be great internationally. And he's going to change the whole world. A couple of weeks ago, there was a program on channel 4 called Baby Bible Bashers. I don't know if any of you saw it. It was one of the most disturbing programs I've ever seen. It was about these three kids, two in America and one in Brazil, and their parents basically abused them by forcing the children to be spiritual leaders while the parents sit back and make money off them. They forced the kids to preach. By preach, I don't mean in the biblical sense, in the sense of what we're doing just now, which is where you take a passage of Scripture and you explain its context and you explain it through illustration and then you tell people how it applies, and it's all about Jesus and the gospel.

These kids, you know, the parents make them preach, and there's one little boy, his parents are Southern Baptists, and his parents make him go out and shout at homosexuals, you know, you're at sodomites and you're going to hell, and it's really abrasive and ungracious, and it's not the gospel.

[25 : 18] And there was this other little boy in Florida, whose parents think that he's kind of a new messiah, and they make him take services, and it's all, you know, kind of all singing, all dancing, and it's really horrible what this child is being forced to do, because his parents believe that spiritually he's something great, and he's got this big future, and the parents were being interviewed

on the program talking about him.

There's a little boy called Terry Durham, who's nine years old, and they're talking about, you know, in three years' time, Terry's going to have a mega-million-dollar empire, and they refer to it in those terms, and you know, in three years' time, he's going to have a 1.5 million-dollar mega-church, and it's going to have 30,000 members, and within 10 years, we want to grow the empire to make it international.

And this is a nine-year-old child, and he's under all this pressure all the time. He doesn't have a clue what the gospel is. You see it in his preaching. And it's awful. It's child abuse.

But what we have here is nothing like that. You have one child who is the messiah, and whose parents, you know, they're not egging him on to do it.

It's God speaking through all these other sources to say that this baby is a world saviour. You have a young couple, their infant son, and they're stunned at what they've just heard, that their son is going to change the world.

[26 : 40] And what comes next takes away any notion that this little world changer is going to have an easy ride, or that he's going to make life easy for his parents, so that, you know, to take away any thoughts of, oh, you know, a million-dollar empire is coming up, it's nothing like that.

A simian blessed them, and he said to Mary his mother, this child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed, and a sword will pierce your own soul too.

Look at other extraordinary things Jesus, that God is doing through Jesus. He will divide the nation. He's destined for the rise and fall of many in Israel. This is Old Testament imagery that he's like one big stone, a big block, and the same block to some is a stumbling block, and they reject it, and then to others, it's the chief cornerstone, the great foundation of life.

Jesus will have this effect, he'll divide people. He said, you know, I don't come to bring peace but a sword. So, you know, Jesus will divide the nation. He's not a passive hippie, he is someone that causes division, and will cause division in his life because of his claims.

I'm God. You know, deal with it or go away, it's that kind of thing. Jesus will be opposed. We see this, that he'll be a sign that will be spoken against, so it's not, you know, here's your meal ticket, Mary and Joseph, and you can write it for all it's worth, because he's going to be the end of the world's most famous person.

[28 : 13] And your life's going to be easy. Your son is going to be opposed, and my goodness, are we going to see that as we look through this Gospel over the year, that Jesus will be opposed to the point of them putting nails through his hands and feet and killing him.

Also, Jesus, in his extraordinary way, always reveals what people are really like, so that thoughts of the hearts of many will be revealed.

You cannot be neutral to Jesus. He presents himself and makes absolute claims, and you have to say, yea or nay. There's no middle ground, there's no, you know, kind of sneaking away quietly and thinking that, because you've not said yes or no, that you're somehow in the middle.

If you've done that, you've said no. He reveals the hearts of everyone that he comes into contact with, whether they accept him and through his grace live different lives, or whether they reject him. And it ends on this chilling note to Mary, that a sword will pierce her heart also. What's going to happen to the life of this gorgeous baby that she is so thrilled with will break her heart.

[29 : 21] Because, and this is where it all comes together. This is the crescendo of the sermon, where you see why we should worship Jesus, like nothing on earth. Because the extraordinary thing that Jesus will do, the most extraordinary thing that he will do, his great victory to bring revelation and salvation to all the nations of the earth, and to bring glory to Israel, this great victory will be hidden in the guise of defeat.

In winning the greatest of victories, this little baby will have to go through a defeat, and hide his victory in that defeat, that will break his mother's heart.

You see, Jesus is not a conventional hero. He accomplishes everything God has given him to do, and yet his glory and his victory are hidden.

They're veiled. I mean, who would you expect to be the most important human being ever? The greatest world changer. You know, if you were looking at all the circumstances that you would expect to come together to produce the greatest man of all time, you would never ever pick Jesus.

Because he was born in the back of beyond, in apparently dubious social circumstances. His parents were poor. He had very little formal education. He was socially a nobody.

[30 : 44] His working life was in a low paid job, so he had no financial clout, no prestige. He was politically weak because he came from a small town in an occupied nation, and he wasn't a Roman citizen.

He never married, he never had children. He never wrote any books. He was never photographed or filmed. He didn't live in the era of global mass media. He lived 2,000 years before instant global communication.

He was only actively engaged in spreading his message for 3 years, which he spent homeless. And then at the end of that time, he was betrayed by one of his closest followers, and then he was crucified, executed like a common criminal.

Now, if you put all of those ingredients together, what you do not get, logically, is the most important person, the greatest world changer that ever existed.

And the reason that it doesn't look like that is precisely because his glory and his victory were hidden and were veiled in the guise of defeat.

[31 : 49] You see, at the crucifixion, at the great low point of, you know, externally the great low point of Jesus' life and ministry, is his greatest high point and his greatest victory.

At the crucifixion, the devil thought, that's it, I've won, because he's dead. Because the devil is intrinsically proud, you know, trace it back to the root of his sin. He's proud, he thought he'd won, because he has no humility, and he couldn't see that Jesus was hiding his victory in defeat.

Whereas God, on the other hand, is humble, and in his humility, he hid his victory in the defeat of the cross. And that is why Jesus is extraordinary. That's why Jesus deserves our worship, because he and only he, no one else could do this.

He can enter into normal life, into the ordinary world, and he can subject himself to the most limiting set of circumstances you can possibly imagine. You know, what would you add to Jesus' experience that would place him in any more of a state of humiliation in life?

And he can take that, and from within that context, the most ordinary life and almost limiting aspects of that, he can then rise up and achieve the greatest victory, the most extraordinary of victories, by going through the greatest of defeats.

[33 : 15] And that's why you should want to worship Jesus, because he is fully ordinary, he is fully extraordinary. He's everything you could ever imagine and want in a Savior, in a God.

It's not like anyone, anywhere else, we've got some questions for you to think over at home that are on the sermon outline, some of the practical implications of this to reflect on.

So we'll leave you to go away with those, but we'll stop now and we'll pray in response to God's word. Lord in heaven, we worship you in response to your revelation of yourself in Jesus, and we praise you because we as Gentiles know what God is like, because we've seen you in the face of Jesus Christ, revealed to us in His incarnation and the knowledge of that being preserved through the last 2,000 years in your Word, the Bible.

So Lord, we worship you for everything you've done through Jesus, and we worship you, Jesus, for everything you have done for us, and coming into ordinary life, and in being sinless and fully human, being everything that we ought to be, and for doing that in our place.

We also worship you, Jesus, for being extraordinary, and for your great work of saving us and of having victory hidden in defeat.

[34 : 42] We pray that you would make us humble enough to accept that truth, and that in your great defeat, we would see your great victory and be transformed by it, and that we would want to worship you because of the cross.

Amen.