

The Consolation of Simeon

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 25 December 2021

Preacher: Cory Brock

[0 : 00] Luke chapter 2, just the next page over, verses 22 to 35. And so if you have the Bible, you're a copy of God's word, please do turn there and we'll look at this text together for a few minutes this morning.

Luke 2, 22 to 35, the story of Simeon and Christ's purification. 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 paraturtle doves or two young pigeons.

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon and this man was righteous and devout waiting for the consolation of Israel and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

And he came in the Spirit into the temple and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him according to the custom of the law, he took him up in his arms and he blessed God and he said, Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace according to your word.

[1 : 22] For my eyes have seen your salvation that you've prepared in the presence of all peoples a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.

And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother, 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 heart also so that the thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.

Let's pray together. God, we give thanks for your word. We give thanks this Christmas day as we celebrate the festival of the birth of Jesus. We give thanks for the fact of the word in flesh.

Lord, your word has been inscripturated for us. Your word has come to us as man, Jesus Christ. And so we come to that today with hearts of thanksgiving and we come today asking that for a few minutes you would quiet our hearts so that we could be changed.

So Holy Spirit of Christ come and meet with us now and help us to understand this story from the account of Simeon and Jesus. And we ask for help in Jesus' name.

[2 : 37] Amen. Well, we just read this story of Simeon and his encounter with Christ at the temple. This is 40 days old on this day in this story.

And this is a Christmas story. This is part of the Christmas narrative, but it's a very unfamiliar Christmas story. It's not one that gets as much attention as the others usually at Christmas time. And you know, there are all sorts of annunciation texts, announcement texts where the angels come and announce the coming of John the Baptist and the coming of Christ.

And this is another annunciation text, it's Simeon announcing saying, behold, everybody in the temple that's standing around, listen in, this child has come.

And this is an annunciation unlike any of the other annunciations because what Simeon says is a very unusual pronouncement. He says, behold, there's the tagline of the past.

And this boy has come for the falling and the rising of many and to be opposed. And so in this annunciation, it's different because Simeon is saying Christmas has something to do with conflict.

[3 : 49] Jesus is coming to the world for conflict, that he's come for the falling and the rising of many. So let's just think about that for a few minutes together. First how Christ makes us fall and then how Christ makes us raise, how he raises us up.

So first how Christ makes us fall. So Jesus is a newborn baby. He's 40 days old and it's the custom, the law of Israel that a 40 day old baby has to be brought to the temple, the firstborn to be dedicated to God.

And at the same time, a mother would be pronounced clean by the priest in this 40 day ceremony. And at the same time, the Holy Spirit has come and met with this man, Simeon.

He's an old man. We don't know anything else about him. And the Holy Spirit has said, you will not die before you see the Lord's Christ, the Messiah.

And when Simeon sees this baby, he knows that this is the moment. And the Holy Spirit reveals that to him and he pronounces out loud, this child has come for the consolation of Israel.

[4 : 58] Now that's the key word. He says that the child has come for the consolation of Israel. What does he mean by that? What does the word consolation mean? And actually, this word consolation here is the exact same word in the Greek text that stands behind our translation for the word that Jesus uses for the Holy Spirit.

The pericle has come. The consolation has come. It literally just means comfort. The comfort has come. And Simeon is saying that because he's pronouncing a prophecy that's being fulfilled.

And the prophecy is very clear. It comes to us from Isaiah chapter 40. And in Isaiah 40, God had said through Isaiah comfort, consolation, consolation, comfort, comfort, my people, pericle, pericle.

I'm looking, the people of Israel at that time were in exile. And Isaiah was talking about that. And they had lost their lands. They had lost their livelihoods. They had lost many their children in their lives.

And they were under captivity. And they were crying out and saying, Lord, comfort, comfort, consolation, consolation, be upon us. They were saying that we are awaiting the Lord's Christ, the Davidic Messiah, the one who would come in the line of David to be the comfort, comfort of Israel.

[6 : 20] And now Simeon is standing here with a 40-day-old little baby. And he looks at that little baby and he says, there's Isaiah 40 fulfilled. Consolation has come to the people of God.

Comfort, comfort has fallen upon the people of God. And literally what happens here in verses 29 to 32, if you have a Bible, you'll see that it should be in poetic structure because the way it begins is that he, Simeon, this old man takes Mary's baby into his arms.

They don't know each other. He takes the baby and the text literally says that he eulogized God. The word there is eulogized. He blessed to eulogize this to bless.

He eulogized God. And what we get here in 29 to 32 is this beautiful Christology, kind of this very fool. I mean, everything's here. You could write a whole book around it.

Just listen to what he says. He says, now that I've seen the baby, I can die in peace. In other words, he's saying, if I can see Jesus Christ, I can even face death without fear.

[7 : 25] And he goes on from there and he says, seeing Jesus Christ, putting my eyes on Jesus, that's salvation. And that's the hope of salvation for anybody, seeing Jesus Christ in the end of history.

And he says, Jesus means, this baby means God has fulfilled his word. Now I can say that all the prophecies of the Old Testament have come to fruition. And then he says, this Messiah is in the presence of all people for everybody, Jew and Gentile, the fullest revelation of God, light in the midst of darkness.

And that's it. I mean, that's everything. It's a very full account of all that Jesus is and has come for. And we put lights out at Christmastime in the midst of the darkest season of the year because of what Simeon said.

Jesus Christ is the light that's come into the darkness. And those lights we put out are signs of the light that's come into the darkness. Now, so far so good.

This is a beautiful passage. It's a passage actually that people would sing in the early church. It was a hymn that was written from Simeon's words here.

[8 : 34] And then Simeon turns to Mary and there's a but, a yet. And it's this, this baby, this baby, this child will cause many to fall.

And he will be, and he will cause conflict and people will oppose him. And let me think about that with you for just a minute.

Literally what Simeon says is this child will cause the ruin of many is the very literal word there. He will make many to be ruined. And at the heart of Christmas, Simeon is saying there, there is a conflict of sorts.

And Jesus Christ, the Christmas child has come into the world for that conflict. And just listen to a couple of the other passages in the gospels that spell this out. There's almost a back and forth, a seeming contradiction, a paradox in the gospels.

Because listen, it's Matthew 10. Do not think I've come to bring peace. I've come to bring a sword. But then you've got a text like 9, Mark 950 that says I've come so that you may, you may be at peace with one another.

[9 : 39] Or Luke 12, do you think that I've come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you I've come to bring division. And then John 14, peace I leave with you. He says I've come to bring peace and I've come to divide.

And there's almost a schizophrenia going on. What is it Jesus? What have you come to do? And the answer I think that Simeon's giving us here is that Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ came to a lost world bathed in sin, death, and disaster to bring peace by way of conflict.

Jesus Christ would bring peace, but to do it, he had to come and bring conflict. He had to come and wage war. He had to come and he had to divide. Now let's just close this point by asking what exactly does that mean?

And commentators talk about this a lot and they'll say all sorts of things. But one of the ideas I think that Simeon is thinking of is the idea of the stumbling stone from the Old Testament.

And it comes to us in Isaiah 8 verse 14 and it says this, he will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to both the houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

[10 : 54] So there it's talking about the Messiah and he will come and be a rock of offense to all of Israel. And when it says in this text, when Simeon says many will fall, that many there is sort of an idiom.

It's like saying everybody. He's going to, it's not just saying some, it's saying all of Israel, anybody that sees him has got to fall. Has got literally to be ruined before him.

And I was in Frankfurt and Stuttgart in Germany in 2017 doing a research trip. And I was walking down the sidewalk and I tripped and I looked down and was with a friend and I complained to my friend because I said, you know, what in the world are all these little cobblestones doing in the middle of the sidewalk that are sticking up two inches from the normal pavement?

It was every, you know, human, health officers biggest nightmare. They were sticking up everywhere and as we went along, we kept seeing them and maybe you've been to Germany and seen these, they're called the Stolpersteine, literally the stumbling stones.

And it's a biblical idea and what are they there for? They're there, they were put there starting in 1996 as a memorial. And I looked down and I saw on these stones, they were written in both German and Hebrew, something about an individual person.

[12 : 15] And they're put in front of houses where it was known that Jewish men and women and children were dragged out to be taken to concentration camps or murdered.

And they're there so that the German people and any tourist would trip over them and fall. And the Stolpersteine, the Stolpersteine are there because you're supposed to fall when you walk over them.

And you're supposed to fall because you realize when you're walking through those streets that even in the so-called modern ideal of human progress, of things getting better and better, great evil is never very far from any of us.

And it can arise at any time. And they're there just to do exactly what Jesus came into the world to do. He makes all, everybody who encounters him actually to trip and to fall.

And let me just close by giving you three, close this point by giving you three reasons for that. The first reason is that Jesus makes us fall because his claims are extreme.

[13 : 16] He says, I am the way, the truth, the life, and you can never see God except through me. His claims are so extreme. And then secondly, his actions were so disrupted.

He came into a culture and completely disrupted it. He ate with the people he was not supposed to eat with. He spoke to the Samaritan woman and drank from her bucket.

He was not supposed to touch. Everything he did was so disruptive, but then finally, and this is most important, when you encounter the real Jesus, the gospels tell us, when you encounter the real Jesus, he makes us fall because he exposes us.

You look at him and we're meant to see in all of our hearts exactly what we are and exactly what we're like. He came to the religious and says, you think you're great. You think you followed the Ten Commandments.

But let me show you that unless your motivations have been righteous from top to bottom, you haven't ever obeyed the Ten Commandments. And he does that for every single person.

[14 : 17] He exposes us. And so we're forced to trip over him. And Simeon is saying at the beginning of his life, this little Christmas baby came for a conflict. He actually came to wage war against a part of you.

He came to come and to expose you. He came to make you trip over him. That means that the fact of the incarnation today is first actually a pronouncement of judgment.

Jesus Christ came into the world because humanity was never going to be what it was made to be apart from him. He came to the world because something is wrong with us.

And so we're exposed before him. And that means today, you know, that means that this Christmas child does not ask merely to be respected or liked or given one day a week, a Sunday.

He says, I don't just want your Christmas morning. I want all of you. I want every bit of what you are from top to bottom. Now that leads us then finally to what Simeon says.

[15 : 19] Secondly, he says. Secondly, that he came to raise us up. He came also to bring us peace. And let's just think about that for a couple of minutes, what that means in verse 35 is really helpful when he turns to Mary to understand what it that means that he not only makes us trip, he raises us up and he turns to Mary and he says, Mary, even a sword is going to pierce you your heart as well.

So this is how we know that he's talking about everybody because he turns and says to Mary, you're even going to trip Mary, the mother of God, the virgin who birthed this Messiah, you too will be pierced.

Your sword will pierce your heart as well. Now, what does that mean? Why does he say that to her? And the commentators will say, well, you know, he's going to cause her so much pain throughout her life.

She's going to watch a nation rise up against him. She's going to watch him crucified and murdered. You know, she's she's going to suffer and it's going to he is going to crush her heart when she sees him die.

And I do think that's part of it. But we also know that Mary is going to trip over him too. There's going to be a moment in the gospels where we see Mary not know what to do with him and get embarrassed by him.

[16 : 35] You know, she too will trip. She too will be exposed by him. But even more than that, what is this? What is this saying? And this is it. When you go, if you go back and you were able to see the Greek word that stands behind this word to raise the rising of many, actually, it's the word that is normally translated most of the time in your Bible as resurrection.

And so when he says he says he will he will cause everybody to be ruined, but he will also call the cause the resurrection of many at the same time.

And that means that Samians not only thinking of Isaiah eight, but Isaiah 28 as well. Isaiah eight says he will come to be the stumbling stone. And Isaiah 28 says this, see, I will lay in a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation, the one who relies on it will never be stricken.

In other words, in the saying, Jesus Christ, this baby is the stumbling stone for sinners, but he can also be your resurrection stone. And that's exactly what he's he's saying here to Mary.

He's the stumbling stone and he's the resurrection stone. And this is for you to to Mary. And that means Mary are going to trip over him and he's going to cut you in the heart with a sword. What we have to see as we close is this, that this sword, you know, we think of the sword, it's judicial.

[18 : 02] Is he is how is he's going to judge her to he's going to stab her to. But he can't merely be talking about the sword of ultimate judgment here.

This is not just the sort of ultimate judgment. But because of the fact of resurrection, this means that Mary is actually going to get the surgeon's scalpel, not the sort of judgment, but the surgeon's scalpel.

You know, he's saying, he's going to cut you, Mary. He's going to stab you. You will fall before him, but he will stab you. In other words, he will make you rise up. He will cut you in just the right way.

He's going to give you the surgeon's scalpel. The surgeon's scalpel. What does it do? It cuts you. It goes down to the tumor, to the place that's that's most diseased and it cuts it out.

And that's exactly Jesus came for a conflict. He came, he came to stab, he came to judge, but he came to judge in order to heal. He came to be both the stumbling stone and the resurrection stone at the very same time.

[19 : 04] And so the last word is this, and I'll close with this. How is it? How does he do it? And let me just show you one little thing from verse 23 at the very beginning of the passage and we'll close. He's being consecrated on the 40th day of his life, which was commanded in the Old Testament.

And Mary also had to be purified on this day. The firstborn child had to undergo a specific rite and you'll see there that it said you could bring either a pair of turtle doves or two pigeons as the sacrifice.

And here we're told that they bring two young pigeons. And that was the, that was in the Torah in the Old Testament. You would bring two young pigeons only if you were poor.

And that's exactly what they bring. And what we learn here is that Jesus Christ on the 40th day of his life, he is poor. His family cannot afford the turtle doves. They have to bring the pigeons. And that really means something.

It really means something because the life of poverty he will lead is only one of the ways that he will be ultimately humiliated. It's a sign, it's a mark of his ultimate humiliation, of his humiliation from the beginning of his life to the end of his life.

[20 : 14] And here's the whole story of his humiliation. He is born this day to take the sort of judgment that we deserve so that you could get the surgeon's scalpel this Christmas day.

That his, his life of humiliation, he got the sort of judgment so we wouldn't have to. The incarnation is all about the cross. That's what we're learning today. We are judged in his judgment.

And so how do you rise up with Christ this morning? You rise up with Christ by getting the painful surgery we all need today, which is the surgery of repentance. Now there's, there's nothing we need on Christmas day more than repentance in our lives.

And repentance is the, is the scalpel we need. It's, it says that I fall today before King Jesus. I give myself once more to him so that in trust he will raise me up in resurrection.

Repentance before Christ is today the daily pathway to renewal in 2022. So let's pray together and turn our hearts towards God. Father, we come today with hearts of repentance and we ask that you would give us this heart of repentance and renewal for this coming year.

[21 : 23] We give thanks for the Christmas child and we ask Holy Spirit that you would lift up our hearts to him. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.