

Jesus in the Temple

December 31, 2017

Luke 2:28-35

28 Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,
29 "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word;
30 for my eyes have seen your salvation,
31 which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,
32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."
33 And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him.
34 Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, "This child is destined for the falling
and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed
35 so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed — and a sword will pierce your own soul
too."

Our Journey through the Bible takes us to the birth of Jesus which is the Advent of Christ. Then there are two ceremonies for a new baby boy. The first one is the ceremony of circumcision and naming. This takes place eight days after the birth of a boy. At this time the child enters into a covenant relationship to live under the law of God with God's people. The second ceremony is for the mother to be redeemed by a priest. This ceremony takes place forty days after the birth of a boy. The mother is considered to be unclean until she presents an offering to the temple. Until then she is forbidden to touch anything sacred or enter into the temple. For the poor the offering is two turtledoves or young pigeons.

The setting is the temple. Simeon is a prophet that is guided by the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is significant in the Bible. Already in the New Testament we have seen the Spirit come upon John, Mary, and John's parents Elizabeth and Zachariah. Now the Holy Spirit is upon the prophet Simeon. In verse 25 it tells us he has received his revelation by the Holy Spirit. So, everything he knows about Jesus comes to him from the Holy Spirit. He knows that he is elderly and that he will see the Messiah during his lifetime. This is a new twist on the progression of events. Up until now the people have been waiting for the arrival of Messiah without knowing when that arrival will take place. But what Simeon knows is unique to him. He is the only prophet that has been promised to see the Messiah in person.

Simeon is now guided by the Holy Spirit to the temple where he recognizes Jesus is the fulfillment of Israel's hope for the Messiah. The Holy Spirit is upon Simeon and has revealed to him that he would see the coming Messiah. We do not know how long he has been waiting for this special moment. Now he has seen the one who brings salvation. The blessing relates the birth of Jesus to the fulfillment of God's promised salvation. Simeon also recognizes and proclaims Israel's consolation is for all people; Jew and Gentile. The Holy Spirit guided Simeon to see God's salvation. This is not an accident. This is not because he just happened to be in right place at right time. The Holy Spirit has led him to recognize God's work in the birth of Jesus.

There is also the prophet Anna in Luke 2:36-38. Anna is similar to Simeon. She is also a prophet, elderly, and devoted. She also recognizes Jesus is the one to bring salvation for Israel and she also praised God when she saw Jesus and his family.

There are some differences between Simeon and Anna who is recognized for her piety as a devout prophet. Whereas, Simeon prophesied the future of Jesus and Mary, Anna testifies - she talked about the child to everybody. Whereas, Simeon was guided by the Holy Spirit to that place and time, Anna never left the temple - she worshiped there day and night.

The significance of these differences is that we have two distinctly different types of prophets. They provide two different testimonies. Two separate testimonies is verification - they confirm each other. We have different viewpoints, different perspectives, different motives, different backgrounds, that provide the same testimonial witness. Therefore, truth is confirmed by the emergence of the spiritual eye witnesses.

The Temple is significant in the Bible. The meeting taking place in the temple is not by accident. What is happening is God's doing. Simeon is guided there by the Holy Spirit. Mary and Joseph fulfill the requirements of the Law. And Anna has been there all along, fasting and praying day and night. The announcement that this is God's salvation occurs at the temple just like the announcement of the birth of the forerunner John the Baptist.

There is an interesting faith characteristic that I noticed here in Bible. All people of faith come to the temple. This is a very strong and powerful contemporary lesson for the lapsed. The people that are consistently absent. Those that claim to be spiritual but not religious. People who believe in Jesus but not the church. The lesson is that all people of faith come to the temple. I will repeat this for emphasis. All people of faith come to the temple. Ever since the first temple was built by king Solomon all people of faith come to the temple. In the Bible people of faith travel days to get to the temple. During the Exile temples were built in communities so that the people of faith could come to the temple because the people could not get to the temple in Jerusalem. We see in the Bible the parents of Jesus bring the baby to the temple. The family returns to the temple every year. When Jesus is twelve he stays at the temple. A lot of the ministry and teaching of Jesus is connected with the temple. Worship in the Bible is conducted primarily at the temple.

When Simeon makes his proclamation that Jesus is the source of salvation he proclaims that Jesus is glory for Israel and a light for revelation to the Gentiles. God's promise of salvation is not just reserved for the Jews but is also for us the Gentiles. There is a distinguishing characteristic of the Gentiles. We worship at the temple but instead of coming to Jerusalem, we are to go to the nations. We still come to the temple; we come to worship at the local church. But we are disciples. We are charged with making disciples. A disciple is someone that follows Jesus Christ. We follow the teachings and the example of Jesus; we live the Jesus lifestyle. This means obedience, humility, devotion, unity, love, compassion, outreach, forgiveness, and the list goes on.

This is an occasion for praising God. The birth of the child is an occasion for praising God. The fulfillment of God's promises is an occasion for praising God. The consolation of Israel and the arrival of the Messiah are occasions for praising God. The lessons we learned, the opportunity to follow, and the call to discipleship, are all occasions for praising God. And the sacrifice; the price that was paid for us is truly a remarkable occasion for praising God. Jesus goes to the temple where prophetic eyewitness proclaim God's salvation for all people.