

THE FACE OF GOD: UNIQUE MOMENTS WITH JESUS CHRIST:

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An Exposition of Luke 2:22-38

I. INTRODUCTION:

40 days following the birth of Jesus and just prior to the visit of the wise men, baby Jesus was taken on his first journey by Joseph and Mary. It was approximately a 5 mile journey from Bethlehem to Jerusalem and would take no more than 2 hours to reach the city gates. Perhaps the same donkey that carried Mary to Bethlehem would be the same to carry both Mary and baby Jesus to Jerusalem.

Just imagine Jerusalem at this time. In the northeastern corner of the city the beautifully white stoned Temple in Jerusalem was nearing completion. It was a magnificent Temple. It had a sprawling enclave rimmed with a labyrinth of colonnaded porticoes and gates. For pious and faithful Jews and Gentile proselytes, this was the center of the world.

II. EXPOSITION:

2:22-24 states:

Now, when the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, Joseph and Mary brought Jesus up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. 2:23 (just as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male will be set apart to the Lord”), 2:24 and to offer a sacrifice according to what is specified in the law of the Lord, a pair of doves or two young pigeons.

- A. As a perpetual reminder all people are born in sin. A mother was ceremonially defiled by the birth of a child.
 - 1. To be sure, we need to understand that “ritual uncleanness is not the same as sinfulness. All sin resulted in uncleanness in Israel, but uncleanness was not always the result of sin.”¹
 - 2. Mary was not in sin because she gave birth to a child. Rather than committing a sin she became unclean because she gave birth. Interestingly, the fact that she became unclean when she bore Jesus gives evidence to the reality of the Incarnation.
 - 3. It may help to understand what is a ceremonial law? A ceremonial law was that which prescribed the rites of worship under the Old Testament.
- B. For Joseph and Mary, two faithful followers of God, they fulfilled the ceremonial requirements with their first born child in two ways:
 - 1. First, the Law of Moses required that women had to purify themselves after childbirth by offerings at the Temple forty days after the birth of a boy and eighty after that of a girl.

¹ www.soniclight.com; *Expository Notes on the Gospel of Luke* by Tom Constable Expository Notes (2008), 34.

- a. In Leviticus 12:8 God made provision for the removal of the ceremonial uncleanness and the restoration of the mother to full fellowship in her family and in her community. Only blood could remove the uncleanness, and so God required a burnt offering and a sin offering to render the mother ceremonially clean.
2. And secondly, in obedience to the law in having a first born, they present Him, set him apart to God as Exodus 13:2, 12 and Number 18:16 declares. So, in verses 22 and 23 we see both obedience and consecration of the gift they hold most dear.
 - a. In Exodus 13:2 God states, ***“Consecrate to me every firstborn male. The first offspring of every womb among the Israelites belongs to me, whether man or animal.”***
 - b. Therefore God claimed the firstborn son in each family as His own possession.
 - c. This son was to become a priest. But after the institution of the Levitical Priesthood in the family of Aaron, God commanded His people to redeem their firstborn. So, every male child not born in the Tribe of Levi was required to be redeemed from priestly service.
 - d. As Numbers 18:15-16 states:

The first offspring of every womb, both man and animal, that is offered to the Lord is yours. But you must redeem every firstborn son and every firstborn male of unclean animals. When they are a month old, you must redeem them at the redemption price set at five shekels of silver, according to the sanctuary shekel, which weighs twenty gerahs (approx. \$4.00).

So, Joseph and Mary present Jesus in the Temple with a double purpose: purification from ceremonial uncleanness and the redeeming of the first born son from priestly service.

C. Two interesting observations from my studies of vv. 22-24:

1. Alfred Edersheim states that the fact that they were able to present Jesus for the priesthood means that Jesus was free of bodily blemishes. Otherwise, he would have been disqualified for the priesthood.²
2. H.A. Ironside makes an interesting observation about their sacrifice of two turtledoves:

They [Joseph and Mary] were numbered among the poor of Israel. That gives us some conception of the place our Savior took in Grace—he was higher than the highest. He who created all things into this world and took His place in a family so poor that they were not able to bring a lamb out of the flock, but they brought the offering of the very needy—two turtledoves.³

² Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times and Jesus the Messiah* (Peabody, M.A., 1993), 1:195 or pg. 136.

³ H. A. Ironside, *Addresses on the Gospel of Luke* (Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux Brothers, 1976), 72.

- D. Though special for the parents and God Himself, everything that happened so far in the Temple presentation was normal. But all of a sudden, the normalcy of the event took an unexpected turn.
- E. There they are, Joseph and Mary, perhaps standing there with their bundled infant in the Court of the Women at the magnificent Temple, when a righteous and devout man named Simeon walked purposefully over to them. He's been waiting for the fulfillment of messianic expectations.
1. Now, the Scripture does not say he is an old man just like text does not say he has red hair but slightly bald. Who knows? We make that assumption because after he took Christ in his arms and praised God he says in 2:29, "***Now, according to your word, Sovereign Lord, permit your servant to depart in peace.***"
 2. But what we do know for sure is that Scripture describes Simeon in four ways:
 - a. **He was righteous.** What a wonderful description as disclosed by the Word of God.
 1. Simeon was an upright man of God in accordance with God's compelling standards. And so, here we have the Word of God honoring him with this treasured description of being a godly person.
 - b. **He was devout.** He was a man who was reverently God-fearing.
 2. Not only does the Word of God honor him with the treasured description of being an upright person, but he honors him as being reverent, devoted, & God-fearing.
 - c. **He was looking for the restoration of Israel.**
 1. He was a man who was anticipating the restoration of Israel. Simeon really trusted God's promise that the Messiah would come and deliver the nation (Isaiah 40:1; 49:13; 51:3; 57:18; 61:2). What trust! He believed God would end Israel's time of alienation and suffering through the advent of the Messiah!
 - d. **The Holy Spirit was upon Him.** Ladies and gentlemen, Simeon was in the will of the Lord. In Luke 1:67 the gospel writer states that the Holy Spirit was upon Zechariah and Elizabeth and now the Holy Spirit is upon Simeon.

Now, look at what happens: vv. 2:26-35:

It has been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ; 2:27 So Simeon, directed by the Spirit, came into the temple courts, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what was customary according to the law, 2:28, Simeon took him in his arms and blessed God, saying. 2:29

Now, according to your word, Sovereign Lord, permit your servant to depart in peace.

2:30 For my eyes have seen your salvation;

2:31 that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples;

2:32 a light, for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.

2:33 So the child's father and mother were amazed at what was said about him.

2:34 Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, 'Listen Carefully: The child is destined to be the cause of the falling and rising of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be rejected. 2:35 Indeed, as a result of him the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed and a sword will pierce your own soul as well!

1. Just in this small portion of Luke we see Simeon's moment with the Savior:
 - a. The Holy Spirit revealed to Simeon that He would not die before He had seen Christ;
 - b. The Holy Spirit directed Simeon to go into the temple courts which coordinated with Joseph and Mary's presentation of Jesus in the Temple and obedience to the Mosaic Law.
 - c. After his praise to God for the fulfillment of that revelation, to behold the Christ Child, Simeon specifically gave Mary a prophetic message regarding her son, the nation Israel, and her own person.

- F. Looking more closely at his prophetic proclamation:
 1. In verse 29 Simeon continues to hold God at his word. Evidently, since he was ready to depart in peace, I suspect his greatest desire had come true. What a God-centered focus! Do you realize what a reward Simeon received from God! He blessed faithful Simeon with a blessing that was unique; here he is the one to be presented Christ. He blesses the faithful.
 2. Look again at verse 29 and notice: Simeon describes himself as a servant. He realizes whom He serves.
 3. What was earlier announced to the shepherds in the field by an angel, "***Today your Savior is born in the city of David. He is Christ the lord***" (2:11) is now being proclaimed by Simeon as he holds this dear child in his arms. In a prophetic proclamation concerning the Jesus Christ. Simeon declares, "***My eyes Have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples*** (vv. 30-31)."
 3. Ladies and Gentlemen: to see Jesus is to see salvation. This Savior is "**prepared in the sight of all peoples.**"
 4. Quoting Isaiah 42:6 and 49:6 Simeon declares Jesus Christ to be a "**light for revelation to the Gentiles**" (Luke 2:32). Consider this phrase:

“Gentiles who are in darkness would see a great light.” That was many of us in this room. Those who were ignorant of God would have a revelation from God to them!

5. Simeon goes on to say and, ***“for glory to your people Israel.”*** Israel was to receive the revelation of the glory of God. So, in summary, Jesus is going to bring “revelation to pagans and glory to Israel.”

H. What is Joseph and Mary’s response to this revelation? In spite of all that already know and ponder, they marveled! They were amazed! You wonder why? Perhaps it is because they had not considered the fact that His ministry would be the entire world.

I. But Simeon’s prophetic message continues in verses 33-35:

Simeon blesses God and turns his attention on Mary with vivid words perhaps accompanied with a very somber tone: Mary:

“This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be sign that will be spoken against, 35 so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

1. Simeon predicts that this son is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel. See, many in Israel would be brought to a moral decision, some to a point of collapse and others to what can well be called a resurrection. He will proclaim that the only way to the kingdom, something the nation had long sought, was to follow Him. There will be a cost to Jesus. As the one who Himself is the ultimate “sign,” the visible affirmation of God’ intentions, he will be vulnerable to the hostility of unbelievers. And this grief because of the hostility directed toward Mary’s son, would be terribly painful to her, like a sword piercing her soul.⁴
2. Following Jesus return to Bethlehem the wise men will make their famous visit the future king of Judah. After their visit, Herod became enraged and with Herod’s anger we see the beginning of the unfolding of Simeon’s prophecy: the massacre of children two years and under in and surrounding Bethlehem (Matthew 2:13-18):

A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud wailing, Rachel weeping for her children, and she did not want to be comforted, because they were gone.

J. Simeon wasn’t the only one to have a moment with the Messiah. In verses 36-38 we turn to Anna.

³⁶And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phan-uel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a

⁴ Bible Knowledge Commentary, ed. Walvoord & Zuck, Luke 2:34-5.

virgin,³⁷ and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day.³⁸ And 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.

1. Anna was a godly widow, one who had been married only seven years before her husband died. She too was also blessed with the unique opportunity to be there for the presentation of Christ, who is salvation, in the Temple. She is described in Scripture as one who never left the Temple but was involved in worshipping night and day, fasting and praying.
 2. Anna, a prophetess, adds to the message Simeon proclaimed. She gives thanks to God and announces to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem (cf. v. 25) that the Messiah has come.
- K. In summary we have the parents being obedient to the law. Then all of a sudden Simeon, a righteous and devout has the unique blessing, a gift from God, to be presented with Christ. Simeon has a moment with the Savior. What a gift! What a portrait! His greatest desire is realized.
- L. Anna, a widow of 84 years, one who made her life's ambition to worship God with every ounce of her being, had been given the opportunity to gaze upon Him and carry the message to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem!

His mission was not the Temple as magnificent as it was. His mission was not the land as is important as it was. His mission was not to correct the erroneous additions to the law. Rather, here is as a newborn baby his mission is already clear: saving souls: both Jews and Gentiles! He loves people.

M. What are some common features we see with Simeon and Anna?

1. They both were servants of God.
2. Under divine inspiration they testified to the uniqueness of Jesus. In fact, Luke assures us of the credentials of Christ by these two reliable testimonies, did he not? Both devout, undoubtedly respected, both faithful, God-honoring servants at the Temple. And both were blessed to see Him before Joseph and Mary find out that they have to leave for Egypt to escape from Herod's wrath.
3. Both of these godly people recognized Jesus as the Savior who would redeem Israel.

Do you recognize Him as such? Do you know Him as the Savior this Christmas Season:

You may, like some, reject Him. You may, like others, be impressed and attracted without definitely yielding to Him. Or you may be intellectually convinced and yet try to evade. But the one thing you cannot do is to ignore Him. 'What do you think of Christ?'

is a question that has to be answered. What shall you do with Jesus' is a question that cannot be avoided. The question is far too serious to be ignored even if you could do so. The remarkable fact about Christ is that, unlike every other founder of religion, He cannot possibly be overlooked. Even the attempt to ignore Him is in reality a confession of an opinion about Him. Indifference is possible about many things, but absolutely impossible about Christ.⁵

All that is required of you is the one sufficient attitude of the soul: trust. This attitude and response of trust is the essential attitude and response of your soul to God. To be sure, receiving this love gift of salvation by placing your trust in Jesus Christ, believing He is God, who died on the cross for your sins and rose again-for ever puts an end to the emptiness inside and delivers you from your past. He bestows upon you the gift of eternal life and then gives you the capacity, the enablement, and joy to live a life worthy to be lived.

III. HOW SHOULD WE THEN LIVE?

- A. As I ponder Simeon's moment, time after time, my eyes typically fill with tears. Why is it so moving? I believe one reason is that we see an account whereby Simeon is touched with goodness, an undeserved blessing, a gift from God, who shows his love to Simeon by giving him this opportunity to see the Messiah, to see the face of God. That moment was uniquely designed for him and Anna was blessed to participate in that event.
- B. But did you know Scripture disclosed particular moments you will have with Jesus Christ?
- C. If you are a believer, then you have had one moment with Christ. Borrowing from Gaither's phenomenal song, "*Shackled by a heavy burden, 'neath a load of guilt and shame, then the hand of Jesus touched me and now I am no longer the same! He touched Me! Oh He touched Me and oh the joy that floods my soul; something happened and now I know; He touched me and made me whole!*"

D. You've had a moment with the Savior.

You came to recognize that Jesus loves you, set you free from sin, the penalty of death has been paid. He is now your rock, your living water, your bread of life, and your vine! Now you are set free to love Him.

- 1. Now that you are free, how are you using it? Can each of us be characterized like Simeon and Anna, people have unilaterally given themselves over to God, truly committed to Him and his ways? Are you striving to be faithful before Him, honestly living for Him? Like Simeon and Anna, the opportunity is there for you to make your life count for something great; to really live for what is important. Many times as believers it is not a choice between two evils but a choice between two goods. The decision-making involved in that choice reveals a lot about one's character. Will this action demonstrate the most glory? Will this choice demonstrate my love to God the most-especially when you are placed in difficult circumstances where it is difficult to choose.

⁵ Adapted from a passage from W.H. Griffith Thomas' superb book, *Christianity is Christ*, 155.

- a. Consider Simeon: He served among religious leaders who were corrupt, money-changers who abused others, and religious hypocrisy with no barriers... all under the control of Herod, a tyrant and ruthless leader.
 - b. Consider Anna: Her life as a married woman was taken from her. Only married for 7 years--that is all. Who knows... she may have been robbed of having children, living a life of loving matrimony. But did the unfortunate circumstance of her past keep her from giving herself completely to the devotion of God. No, not at all. God blessed her!
2. Like Simeon and Anna, did you know there are other particular moments you will have with Jesus Christ as disclosed in His written Word? I would like to touch on 4 of them:
- a. If the rapture does not occur in your lifetime, the moment you die and take your first celestial breath, you will not see baby Jesus wrapped lying in a manger. No, I suspect you will see what the apostle John saw when Jesus revealed himself as disclosed in Revelation 1:10-19:

I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. ¹⁰ I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet ¹¹ saying, "Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea." ¹² Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³ and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. ¹⁴ The hairs of his head were white like wool, as white as snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, ¹⁵ his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. ¹⁶ In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength. ¹⁷ When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, ¹⁸ and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. ¹⁹ Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this.⁶

- b. Your moment will then be one where you not only see Him as God. And as God He is a Promise-Keeper! Thus, when you take your last breath on earth, when you are lying there knowing your life on earth has come to an end, it should not be one filled with anxiety. In fact, it shouldn't be much different than Simeon's anticipation to see Jesus Christ.

Not only have you had a moment where you have seen Jesus as Savior, but you will see Him as God. But not only will you see Him as God, but there is proclaimed in God's prophetic Word whereby you will see Him as Rewarder.

- 3. Following the Rapture of the Church (pre-tribulational), you and I will go before the Judgment Seat of Christ where Jesus Christ will reward you for your faithfulness on

⁶ *The Holy Bible : English Standard Version.* Wheaton : Standard Bible Society, 2001, S. Re 1:9-19

earth. At that event you will see Jesus as Rewarder. Though elaborated in 1 Corinthians 3, deduced from 2 John 8, consider this particular passage in 2 Corinthians 5:9-10:

*So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. ¹⁰For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.*⁷

- a. You and I will be presented before Jesus Christ and be rewarded based upon our faithfulness to Him.
 - b. Will he know us as those who are faithful? Or will he say we have exchanged the important for unimportant, the extraordinary for the ordinary.
 - c. Strive to be faithful to such an extent that it becomes your identity. Be a living sacrifice. Like Oswald Chambers states, “go to the funeral of your own independence.” Like John Piper states in his work, *The Wasted Life*, don’t be consumed with a lifestyle that really doesn’t matter. Recognize your possibilities/potentialities and even your frailties-for life is vaporous. Like steam blowing from kettle, your life is here for a moment then gone the next.
4. **Not only will you have the moment whereby you will come face to face with the living God and the Rewarder of Faithfulness, but following the Great Tribulation you will have another moment with Him when you see Him as Conqueror and Ruler!**
- a. Listen to these words from **Revelation 19:11-17 & 20:6**:

¹¹ Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. ¹² His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. ¹³ He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. ¹⁴ And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. ¹⁵ Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. ¹⁶ And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written:

KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.⁸

- b. Never is there an occasion to give into despair; God’s victory over evil is secured.
- c. As King He will rule with perfect justice and righteousness. The Biblical Covenants [Abrahamic; Davidic; Land; New Covenant] will be fulfilled and glory will be restored to Jerusalem.

⁷ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version.* Wheaton : Standard Bible Society, 2001, S. 2 Co 5:9-10

⁸ *The New King James Version.* Nashville : Thomas Nelson, 1982, S. Re 19:11-16

5. Lastly, there will be another moment when you see Christ: You will see Him as Glory in the New Jerusalem; He will light the world for eternity: Consider these words from **Revelation 21:22-22:5:**

²² But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. ²³ The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb *is* its light. ²⁴ And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it. ²⁵ Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there). ²⁶ And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it. ²⁷ But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

22 And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. ² In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, *was* the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each *tree* yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree *were* for the healing of the nations. ³ And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. ⁴ They shall see His face, and His name *shall be* on their foreheads. ⁵ There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever. ⁹

IV. IN CONCLUSION:

Simeon was uniquely giving the honor to be presented with Jesus Christ. It was a moment designed for Him and Anna was able to rejoice in the plan. Unlike Simeon the Holy Spirit is not merely upon you, he is in you. Therefore, the opportunity is before you while you have air to breathe, to really live like Simeon did in anticipation of the moments you will have with Christ when you see Him as God, Rewarder, Conqueror, Ruler, and Shekinah Glory itself.

⁹ *The New King James Version*. Nashville : Thomas Nelson, 1982, S. Re 21:22-22:5