

This King: Salvation to the Nations

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Date: 20 November 2022

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[0 : 00] Let's pray again and ask God for his help. Father, this morning we come as your gathered people. We come as people in the name of the Lord Jesus, who is our saviour.

And we thank you, Lord, that you are a saviour who speaks to us, who wants us to know what you want us to hear. So, Father, we just pray that this morning you'll give us ears to hear and minds to receive, eyes to see, hearts to believe, and lives that obey your word today.

All this we pray for your glory. Amen. What will help you be ready to die? According to Dylan Thomas, nothing, really.

Dylan Thomas was a poet and probably his best-known poem from the 20th century is called Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night. Let me just read to you the opening lines from that poem.

It's on the screen. Do not go gentle into that good night. O age should burn and rave at close of day. Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

[1 : 19] So what is Thomas trying to say? Well, basically, he's urging us when facing death, resist. Don't go passively.

Fight against it. No matter how old you are, don't let the light die out. Fight till your final breath against death. Very heroic, isn't it?

And yet, at the same time, it's a very sad picture. Let me just read to you now the final stanza from this poem. And you, my father, there on the sad hike, curse.

Bless me now with your fierce tears, I pray. Do not go gentle into that good night. Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

You see, at the very end, Thomas is desperate. He's poignantly begging his dying father to keep fighting the inevitable, to do anything at all to show he still has life.

[2 : 22] But he knows very well this is energy spent in vain, for it is directed at an impossible goal. And so all Dylan Thomas leaves us with is a picture of someone not at peace, someone not ready to face death, but also someone who has no answer for it.

By contrast, in our passage today, we find an old man, Simeon, ready to die. Just look at verse 29. Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace.

In other words, Simeon is saying, now I can die happy. I'm more than ready to go. And so naturally we ask, why? Why can Simeon say that?

Why is he so different from Dylan Thomas? Is it because he's traveled the world, seen the places he's wanted to see, and ticked off all those items off his bucket list?

Well, no. It's not because of where he's been, but who he's seen. He's seen the baby Jesus, carried him in his arms, and as a result, he's ready to go into that good night.

[3 : 46] But how in the world does this Jewish baby help prepare you and I for death? Well, it depends on whether we recognize who this baby is, doesn't it?

You might have heard the story of Queen Elizabeth and the American tourists. In the summer, the Queen likes to take her holidays up in Scotland at Balmoral Castle, and she likes to take picnics around her estate.

Now, one summer, while she was doing that with her bodyguard, she encountered two American hikers. They greeted one another, and soon it was pretty clear that the hikers had no idea who they were talking to.

After some introductory small talk, the Americans asked, So, where do you live? The Queen simply replied, Oh, I normally live in London, but I have a holiday home just around here where I've been coming to for decades.

And the tourists got excited, and they asked her, Well, if you've been coming for that long, then you must have seen the Queen. And the Queen immediately replied, Oh, I haven't, but, pointing at his bodyguard, at her bodyguard, he has.

[5 : 01] And basically what happens next is that the hiker gets so excited that he asks the Queen to take a picture of him and the bodyguard, and then out of courtesy, he then takes a picture with the Queen as well.

And as they wave goodbye, the Queen says to her bodyguard, I would love to be a fly on the wall when he shows those pictures to his friends in America and someone tells him who I am.

Well, today Luke wants to help us avoid making that same mistake as the American hikers. He will show us who this baby is. Now, he's been doing that multiple times over the past few weeks.

Through the pronouncements of the angels and through the prophecies of Mary and Zechariah, he's told us that Jesus is the King from the line of David come to redeem.

But he knows we're really slow to learn. And so he wants to help us be certain. He wants to keep fleshing out how important Jesus really, really is.

[6 : 11] For when we really, really, really know that, we can have the same response as Simeon. We can be ready to face death.

We can be at peace. So once again, if you've closed your Bibles, let's open them again to Luke 2, verse 21 to 40, and we're going to see who this Jesus is and his significance.

Firstly, Jesus is Israel's perfect obedience. Having been in the fields of the shepherds last week, the scene now shifts to the Jerusalem temple.

And as we read verses 21 to 24, it all seems very mundane. Just a typical Jewish family doing typically Jewish things. And we might find ourselves asking, Luke, do we really need to know all these day-to-day details?

After all, if I were to tell my friends about my wait at JPN to get my newborn sons, my kid, and then the visit to the clinic to get his vaccinations, they would probably get very bored very quickly.

[7 : 21] So, hey, Luke, why not just skip all this and get straight to the point? Except, this is the point. It's no accident that Luke takes the time to recount the family's visit to the temple here.

And what is his point? Well, look at verse 22. When the time came for the purification rites required by the law of Moses, and then jump to verse 23, as it is required in the law of the Lord, and then verse 24, in keeping with what is said in the law of the Lord, well, when we see that repetition, we begin to get the point.

Luke wants us to know everything about this baby is going to be in line with God's law. Just in case we're not sure about that, Luke underlines the point again at the end of the entire section in verse 39.

when Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the law of the Lord. And so Luke wants to make clear for us that this baby is the real deal.

He's going to be a model Israelite. He's going to be consecrated to the Lord, as verse 23 puts it. That's simply fancy language to mean he's going to be set apart.

[8 : 49] And to leave us in no doubt, Luke shows us how in three different ways. First of all, verse 21, this baby is circumcised.

In Genesis 17, we're told that any male descendant of Abraham should be circumcised on the eighth day as a sign of God's covenant with his people.

And so as Jesus is circumcised, he is being clearly marked out as an Israelite of faith. Second of all, this baby is dedicated.

Back in Exodus, God brought judgment striking down the firstborn son of everyone in Egypt. However, he provided a way out for the firstborn of every Israelite, redeeming them through the blood of a lamb.

And ever since then, every Israelite firstborn is to be dedicated to show that they belong to the Lord. That's what Exodus 13 says.

[9 : 57] As the firstborn are given over to God, Israel remembers again how God redeemed them. And so as Jesus himself is being dedicated, he is being identified once again with Israel and especially their salvation story.

And then third of all, there is purification. After Genesis and Exodus, we now turn to Leviticus chapter 12.

There we're told a woman has to undergo a purification ceremony 40 days after giving birth to a boy during which she needs to make the necessary sacrifices.

If you are poor, then a pair of doves or two young pigeons are sufficient. And so these parents, not wealthy by any means, do all this so that Jesus can be presented properly without a hint of uncleanness.

So what we keep finding over and over again is Jesus meeting the requirements of the law right down to the smallest detail.

[11 : 14] Now, why might that be significant? Well, you see, back in Exodus, Israel was given the gift of the law. And the law was a gift because it told them how to be like God in his goodness, in his generosity, even in his gentleness.

And if they kept it, they'll enjoy blessing. But if they broke it, they'll fall under curse. Now, that makes sense, doesn't it?

If God is good, going his way surely leads to goodness. And running from his way surely leads to badness. But the problem is, as we survey Israel's history, they can't stop going the way of badness.

And so, the curse falls on them as they watch their monarchy collapse, their kingdoms split into two, their dignity insulted as they are thrown into exile, all because they are being lawbreakers.

That's half the Old Testament. But here's the important thing. It's not just Israel who keeps going astray. You see, the Bible says, non-Jewish people might technically not be under the law of Moses, but we all have the law written on our hearts.

[12 : 41] We know what is right and what is wrong enough to know when we have crossed the line. But the problem is that Israel simply represents what we all keep on doing, going against the lawmaker.

indeed, that's why those rules about circumcision and purification exist in the first place. These symbolic acts reveal to us that ever since Adam and Eve first disobeyed, we are all naturally unclean before God.

The law shows us what we are really like. And they show us that as a result, death is our natural end. And we might not want to go gentle into that good night.

We might want to rage against the dying of the light, but there is nothing we can do about it. But now, Luke shines a spotlight on someone who is an Israelite through and through.

He shines a spotlight on someone who is in full conformity with the law. And in so doing, he is really getting us to ask, could there finally be someone who can keep the law of God perfectly?

[14 : 00] After all, throughout Israel's history, we not only find a record of human law-breaking, but a record of God promising. And God kept promising over and over again that he would not let this state of affairs remain, that he will reverse the curse, that he will bring blessing to the entire world.

But those promises seem to depend on finding someone who could keep the law, someone who is not a law-breaker. And here is the good news Luke wants us to hear.

That person is here. Now, to see that fully, we have to keep reading Luke's gospel, of course. But when we do so, we discover that the one who perfectly met these legal requirements as a child will continue to do so as an adult.

You see, if the law says, love God with all your being, the question is, have you? If the law says, love your neighbor as yourself, the question is, have you?

have you? If the law says, don't ever say anything to make yourself look good and others look bad, that's called bearing false witness, or don't look at what other people have and wish you could have it instead of them, that's called coveting.

[15 : 34] The question is, have you? And I think, you and I know that when we die and we stand before the judge of the universe, he will be able to pinpoint every moment where we haven't.

But here is the good news. When that question is asked of Jesus, he can say, yes, I have. have. At every point where you and I fail, Jesus does it.

He is holy in every way. And indeed, although Jesus is dedicated as the firstborn, it's interesting that another thing that usually happens on behalf of the firstborn does not happen to him.

According to places like Numbers 3 and Numbers 18, parents were to pay redemption money to the priesthood for their firstborn to be released from priestly service.

But Luke never records that. It's almost as if it's signalling to us, Jesus will indeed end up serving as a kind of priest.

[16 : 54] There is no need to pay the price of redemption for him. For as Galatians 4 verse 4 tells us, he is born of a woman, yes, he is born under the law, yes, but unlike all before him, he will ultimately be able to redeem those under the law for he is able to pay the price of redemption himself.

He is Israel's perfect obedience. and because he is the perfect Israelite, that's why he can be salvation to the nations.

That's the second thing we'll see about Jesus today. Secondly, Jesus is salvation to the nations. You see, why was the law given?

We've already seen that it's a gift to help us to be like God. And we've also seen that the law exposes us. It shows us what we're really like because none of us are able to keep it.

But another reason God gave the law, back in the Old Testament, was so that his people could lead such distinctive lives so as to attract the surrounding nations to come to him and glorify him.

- [18 : 15] The law's purpose is ultimately to bless the world. As Israel live out God's law, they are meant to reveal the God who blesses.
- But as we've already mentioned, sadly, Israel failed. But not all his laws. In verse 25, we're introduced to a man in Jerusalem named Simeon.
- And he was waiting for the consolation of Israel. He was waiting for someone who could carry out Israel's job description. And then down in verse 36, we're told about another Jew, a woman this time, called Anna.
- Now for a character who is only mentioned briefly in the Bible, we're told a lot about her. For one thing, we're told that she's from the tribe of Asher.
- Now again, we might ask Luke, why do we even need to know that? Asher is one of the northern tribes of Israel. And Simeon's name is also derived from another Israelite tribe, a southern one.
- [19 : 30] And so Simeon and Anna, taken together, represent the north and the south, the entirety of Israel, holding its breath as they wait for God to fulfill his promises.
- For Anna, like Simeon, has clearly been waiting also. Verse 37 tells us that she devoted her life to the temple, and verse 38 shows us she has deep knowledge about this promised Messiah.
- And Simeon and Anna together don't just represent Israel. On a deeper level, they represent all of us.
- For just like them, whether we are male or female, don't we also long for someone who could rule this world with perfect justice, with perfect kindness, with perfect love?
- Don't we just long for someone like how Elder Kenny prayed earlier this morning for a statesman, a visionary, a man of integrity, someone who can take off all the boxes? Isn't that why we're always so frustrated with whichever government we elect?
- [20 : 46] Because all of them are so far from this ideal? But now, Simeon has the joy of seeing his longings fulfilled.
- In verse 27, he is led by the Spirit who has already told him he won't die before he sees something wondrous. And what he sees makes him ready to face death.
- For, verse 30, my eyes have seen your salvation. He sees salvation. And not just as a plan, but as a person.
- And what does the Holy Spirit tell him about this particular person? Well, come down with me first to the end of verse 32. He is the glory of your people, Israel.
- In the Old Testament, God's glory came to fill the temple to show that he was dwelling with his people. And it was the ark of the covenant placed in the innermost dwelling place in the temple that represented God's presence.
- [22 : 01] But a few hundred years before Luke was writing, the Babylonians came, conquered Jerusalem and took the ark with them which was never recovered. And so since that time, the ark of the covenant and the glory of the Lord has been gone from the temple.
- It's been gone from his people. That is until now. Simeon testifies that the glory of the Lord has returned the ark.
- And the ark had come back. God has come himself in the flesh. And Simeon recognizes that the Lord is here not just for Israel but for everybody.
- For verse 32 again, not only is he the glory of Israel, he is a light to the Gentiles. Jesus comes and becomes what Israel was meant to be.
- Remember our call to worship this morning? Psalm 98 verses 2 and 3 proclaim that God would make his salvation known, that he would reveal his righteousness to the nations so that verse 3, all the ends of the earth can say they have seen the salvation of our God.

[23 : 22] And now Luke says the time where that is coming true is here. And if all this is true, what does this tell us?

Well, I think Simeon's words here remind us of two things. First of all, it reminds us that salvation is necessary. Now, I wonder if you've ever walked around in a shopping mall when someone suddenly approaches you earnestly with some brochures and a clipboard in hand and turns out that she's from WWF and she's trying hard to convince you that joining and supporting their organization is a good thing.

And you don't disagree, you think, okay, yeah, yeah, WWF, that's a pretty good organization, a worthy one, they do good work advocating for the environment and all of that. but in the end, while it's a worthy cause, well, it's still one of many.

After all, there are many other organizations like the Kuching Autistic Association, the Teach for Malaysia, the Women's Aid Organization, well, they are all worthy too.

And in the end, well, it's not that essential that all of us get involved in this one particular society. if you have some extra time or energy, oh, yeah, yeah, sure, by all means, go out, go help WWF or whoever it is.

[24 : 53] But otherwise, it's fine if you don't. And I wonder if many people treat Jesus in the same way. If Jesus or one of his representatives approaches you, well, sure, yeah, I mean, that's a good thing, I don't deny Jesus is a good guy, he's worthy, but strictly speaking, he's not necessary.

If I don't get on board with him, oh, yeah, that's okay as well. And perhaps even today, that might be the attitude of one or two of you. But when Jesus comes to Simeon, that is not how he reacts.

Remember again who Simeon is. In verse 25, he is described as righteous and devout. In other words, he's the sort of guy whom you think would surely be able to get to God on his own.

Surely he's the sort of guy who doesn't need any sort of salvation. But Simeon thinks differently. He waits for the consolation of Israel.

He hopes waiting, hoping, hoping. Those are actions that all indicate Simeon knows he can't save himself.

[26 : 20] And he's less like someone wondering about in a mall, happily letting people approach him, but more like someone who is trapped in a burning building, crying out for a fireman to rescue him.

And so for a long time, he is waiting, hoping, agitating even for rescue to come. But now, he is at peace because he's seen the fireman.

He's seen Jesus. He needs to be rescued and the rescuer is here. So salvation is necessary.

But Simeon's words also remind us that salvation is for everybody. In Simeon's day, that would include the Romans.

They belong in the category of all nations. They belong in the category of Gentiles. But for the Jews, they also belong in the category of enemies.

[27 : 28] And yet, here is Simeon saying that Jesus is for them too. Offensive as that might sound. What about us today?

Well, it means that Jesus is for that politician who told us a week ago that anyone who didn't vote for his particular party would go straight to hell. It means Jesus is for your apathetic colleague who doesn't seem to care about anything religious sounding at all.

It means Jesus is for your fellow Christian, the one you sometimes struggle with because they don't seem to have anything in common with you. salvation is for all of them too if they keep hanging on to him.

And if Jesus is for everybody, that's good news because that means no matter who you are, you can face death with peace as long as you come to Jesus.

That's the only requirement. And so Jesus is Israel's perfect obedience, he is salvation to the nations, and thirdly, he is a necessary line of division.

[28 : 51] In verse 33, Mary and Joseph marvel at what is being said about their son. Wouldn't you? But Simeon's next words now take on a more ominous tone.

Verse 34, Then Simeon blessed them and said to marry his mother, This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed, and the sword will pierce your own soul too.

Woo! Suddenly we have the language of opposition and of agony. What is going on here? Well, you see, this is Simeon's way of saying, no pain, no gain.

For how is this salvation going to come about? Well, Simeon says to Mary, it will come about on the same day you face bereavement. It will come on the day of your grief.

For Jesus comes as the man of sorrows, born to die, to pay the ransom for all he has come to save. And as his mother, you, Mary, will share in that sorrow.

[30 : 15] For 33 years from this moment, as the pastor Erwin Lutzer puts it, she will see the crown of thorns, but cannot remove it.

She will see the nails, but is not allowed to pull them out. she will see the lacerations, but is not able to soothe her son's pain resolved.

She will hear the mockery, but is not able to quiet the crowd. For her son's ministry will have a mixed reception.

There will be some who reject Christ. There will be some who might acclaim him for a while, but finally will shout, crucify him. crucify him.

And they won't just shout it, they will actually do it. And yes, God will bring good out of what they do, but anyone who sets themselves against God's king will ultimately fall.

[31 : 18] They will never have the peace that Simeon has. But there will be some who receive Christ, who look to him, who are ready to follow him, even to die with him.

And Simeon says, they will rise. Death will not be the end for them. And this is true, is it not, even among Jesus' own 12 disciples?

Not everyone will rise. And it is true even today. You see, in the end, no one can stay on the fence about Jesus forever.

You are either with him or against him. You can't remain permanently neutral about him. Even to say, well, actually, I've got nothing personally against Jesus, but I don't really need to see the need to make a decision about him.

Well, that in itself is already making a decision. It's making a call to say to Jesus, you are not so important that I have to figure you out. What you offer is not so urgent that I can't put it off.

[32 : 32] And so will you therefore number yourselves among those who will rise? Will you pray that you'll be those whose heart will incline towards him?

You see, this is no accident. In verse 34, notice Jesus is described as being destined or appointed in some of the other English translations for this very purpose.

His very death and resurrection will force us to pick sides and which side we pick will reveal what is in our very hearts. So will we choose him and thereby show that we have truly seen and accepted God's salvation?

Will we be willing to trust him and follow him even when it's difficult and costly and means we might make enemies? Or will we reject him and show the very opposite?

You see, Jesus is the necessary line of division even in this very hall, even on November 20th, 2022.

[33 : 45] Will you be on the right side? For as we see Jesus as Israel's perfect obedience, as we see him as salvation to the nations and as a necessary line of division, what this passage then calls for from us is our utmost devotion.

Our utmost devotion. Did you notice that's how everyone in this passage responds? Watch Joseph and Mary as they make sure that in every way they faithfully follow what God's word says.

Watch Simeon and Anna, both of whom reveal themselves to be faithful Israelites as they testify to Christ. Indeed, what a contrast they will be to the unfaithful Israelites later on, including the temple leaders who scream for his crucifixion.

They exemplify how the true people of God receive Jesus and that is with utmost devotion. And my friends, what all of them show us is that age is never a barrier to stop serving Jesus.

Mary and Joseph are a young couple still, but they don't let the burden of caring for a newborn baby become an excuse not to follow God. Simeon and Anna on the other hand are much older.

[35 : 21] We're not told how old Simeon is but he's clearly not a young man. But we are told how old Anna is down in verse 37. It's a little ambiguous.

Either she is 84 years old or she has been a widow for 84 years after seven years of marriage meaning she should be well over 100. Now either way the point of them down or diminish their zeal for the Lord and his kingdom.

Look at Anna in verse 37 still making the most of her time worshipping fasting praying even though she is at minimum at least 80 plus.

And so my brothers and sisters let this passage act as a mirror to you today. As you gaze into this mirror ask yourselves do I look like Mary and Joseph and Simeon and Anna?

If I belong to the older category do I just say let's leave everything to the young ones and let them get on with serving God I just sit back and do nothing.

[36 : 37] Or if I belong to the younger category do I just say I have too much on my plate let others get on with serving. What is the Holy Spirit saying to you today?

What is he revealing about your heart? And if he is saying something to your conscience today then please don't resist him let him move you in the right direction for Jesus is the side that we want to be on today he is the king he is the glory of Israel and he is the one and only person who can ensure that you can face the darkness of death because he is the light who never dies out he is salvation himself and so in Christ we can be ready to die and if we are ready to die we can also be ready to live for him so church shall we give Jesus our utmost devotion today let's ponder that and let's pray heavenly father as we hear your words again and as we see this salvation that is present for us in your word help us by your spirit not to reject this word but help us to receive it the way

Simeon and Anna does help us to hear what you have to say for us help us to rejoice in the one who is our perfect obedience who gives us his righteousness so that we can live for you and so that we can shine a light for you in this dark world we pray all this in the name of Jesus Christ Amen