

Why Does Salvation Come in Such an Unexpected Way?

Today's devotional is taken from my e-book of advent devotionals, [The Light Has Come](#):

The Falling and Rising of Many: Simeon's Prophecy

Scripture: Luke 2:25-35

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 own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed." – Luke 2:34-35, ESV

What do you do when the one thing you've been waiting for all your life finally comes and, when it does, it completely shatters all your expectations? This is not a question that many of us know how to answer, for we've not had enough life experiences to help us here. We are not old men, doubled over by the cares of a long and expectant life. Even in the short years we have lived, we have not unwaveringly sought one thing and hoped for it with all our hearts. Our divided and distracted hearts keep us from feeling real kinship with Simeon.

Simeon was a single-minded man of purposed determination. Luke tells us that he "*was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel.*" God had given Simeon a rare and precious promise, a promise that kept Simeon waiting and watching expectantly: God told Simeon that he would have the honor of seeing Israel's True Hope before he died. When the day came for the promise to come true, "*he came by the Spirit into the temple.*"

Simeon received the promise with great joy. God had been faithful after all! The wait had been long, and Simeon was now a tired old man, but he had finally seen the Long-Expected One with his own eyes! Now he could die in peace, for he had seen God's salvation face-to-face. None of us can die in peace until we have seen God's salvation. Simeon was a man at peace. He now saw what his heart had longed for all those years.

Yet before Simeon passed from this world into the peaceful rest of the righteous, he spoke words that must have taken Mary and Joseph by surprise. I think even Simeon himself was shocked by the words that came from his lips. They were given to him by the Holy Spirit, as a prophecy of things to come. Simeon went to bless Joseph, Mary and Jesus, but the words he spoke were not words of simple blessing, but a dark and mysterious warning.

What did it mean that Jesus was "*destined to cause the falling and rising of many*" and that a sword would pierce Mary's soul? Well, while Jesus' whole ministry exposed "*the thoughts of many hearts,*" I think Simeon was directly speaking of the coming cross. It was at the cross that Mary felt deep pain in her soul as she watched her son shamed and dying before the jeering mob. The cross was the reason for Jesus' coming, and even at His birth, its shadow hung over His life.

As Jesus hung on the cross, heaven and earth intersected in a unique way. In the dying of the Savior of the World, justice and mercy met in a bloody demonstration of the love of God for sinful people. Satan fell and salvation was finally made a reality, as God's justice was satisfied and the chains of slavery that had held God's people were broken.

Something else also happened on that cross, as Jesus died for our sins. The cross was transformed that day from a symbol of human wickedness and torture into a symbol of hope for millions of people. Yet it also became a symbol of God's final and unrelenting judgment against rebellious sinners. Those who embrace the cross and its shame find final freedom in the blood of Jesus, as they receive the forgiveness that can only be found at that dark place.

Those who reject the cross and its offer of forgiveness find something else on Calvary's hill-- a graphic demonstration of God's furious wrath against sin. Those who will not accept what Jesus did on the cross must still see in it the anger of God against wickedness. If they will not allow Jesus to bear that anger, they must be prepared to bear it themselves, something which none of us has the ability to begin to imagine.

The cross offers us no middle ground. It will be our falling or our rising, our destruction or our salvation. And at the cross, our hearts will be revealed before God; there will be no doubt where we stand. Perhaps you never expected to find life at such a place of death. Perhaps you're not ready to accept that someone else's pain could mean peace to your soul. I'm sure Simeon wasn't expecting what God revealed to him, either. The question is, now that you know the truth, what will you do with it?

What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, as it is written,

*“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense;
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.” - Romans 9:30-33. ESV*