

Luke 2:25-35 - The Revealing of Many Hearts

Introduction: A few years ago while sifting through a box of old books and other old junk from yester-year, I came across an old paperback edition of Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*. This was one of the only books I ever read in high-school that really affected me on a personal level. The story of self-sacrifice and true love moved me, although I took great pains to make sure no one around me in my class could see it. I started to reread it and made it through the first few chapters and couldn't help but be awed by the literary genius the Dickens was. But this time I noticed a paragraph that truly struck to the heart of who we are as people. It is the first paragraph of chapter 3. Please hear this:

A WONDERFUL FACT to reflect upon, that every human creature is constituted to be that profound secret and mystery to every other. A solemn consideration, when I enter a great city by night, that every one of those darkly clustered houses encloses its own secret; that every room in every one of them encloses its own secret; that every beating heart in the hundreds of thousands of chests there, is, in some of its imaginings, a secret to the heart nearest it!

Point: Dickens was enough of a student of human nature that he got this point very clearly. People hide so much from one another. There is so much that goes on in the hearts and minds of people that no other people ever know about. There is so much *evil* that is often behind motives, thoughts, and actions as well.

Point 2: People also often put a great deal of carefully thought out effort into making sure that the people in their life around them think *exactly what they want them to think* about them. But the reality that ought to cause every person whose conscience is intact to pause in *grave reflection* is that in the eyes of God, *there are no secrets*.

Hebrews 4:12-13 For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. [13] And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.

Romans 2:16 in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.

And in our text this morning - did you notice v34-35? Luke 2:34-35 Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against [35] (yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

1. Patience for a Promise - v25-26

[25] And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. [26] 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.

Point: Simeon is described at both "just" and "devout." The words mean "morally upright," and "God-fearing."

Point 2: He was "waiting" for "the Consolation of Israel." And he had a very unusual and personal reason to be not only waiting, but *watching carefully*.

Point 3: The reason he was "waiting" - v[26] - *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.*

Who is this "consolation of Israel?" This is referring to the promise of comfort found in:

Isaiah 40:1-2 - "Comfort, yes, comfort My people!" Says your God. "Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her, That her warfare is ended, That her iniquity is pardoned; For she has received from the Lord's hand Double for all her sins."

The term here for “comfort” in the LXX is *parakaleo* - and in the text of Luke 2:15, the noun form of that verb is used. When the Messiah came, He would bring “comfort” and “consolation” to Israel.

What is meant here by “Israel” is not the nation of Israel, but all of the people of God through all the ages - including Gentiles, as the rest of the passage bears out when Simeon pronounced his blessing - Notice v30-32: “For my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel.”

Point 4: Although there were many in Israel waiting for the Messiah of Israel, most of them did not understand the nature of His mission. Most believed the Messiah would crush the oppressing Romans and remove them from the land of Israel, and that he would bring back the glory days of David and Solomon. *This is not what Simeon was waiting for.* He understood clearly what **mankind’s greatest need really was.**

Application to us: If the question was put to us: “What is your greatest need?” and you could only give one answer, what would your answer be?

Illustration: Our greatest need always depends on *what our present situation is*. On the back table, I always make available for anyone - church members, non-church members, visitors, believers, or members of other religions who come here - a wonderful little brown tract - 20 pages long - called: “Why Christianity: solving life’s most important question.” On page one, Ray Comfort wrote:

Imagine I offered you a choice of four gifts:

- The Original Mona Lisa
- The keys to a brand new Lamborghini
- A million dollars in cash
- A parachute

You can pick only one. Which would you choose? Before you decide, here’s some information that will help you to make the wisest choice: *You have to jump 10,000 feet out of an airplane.* Does that help you to connect the dots? It should, because you *need* the parachute. It’s the only one of the four gifts that will help your dilemma. The others may have some value, but they are useless when it comes to facing the law of gravity in a 10,000-foot fall. The knowledge that you will have to jump should produce a healthy fear in you - and that kind of fear is good because it can save your life. Remember that.

Application: Simeon was waiting for the “consolation.” He was waiting for the great comfort that would one day come from God. Simeon knew that his greatest need was far greater than deliverance from political oppression. He knew that his greatest need was to be forgiven of his sins and reconciled to God. To bring forgiveness and reconciliation with God was Jesus’ primary mission. He did not come as a political deliverer, but as a Savior from sin. Listen to His own words as He described His mission:

John 6:38-39 “For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. [39] This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day.”

John 17:1-3 “Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: “Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, [2] as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. [3] And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”

John 5:24 “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.

Jesus is indeed the King of kings and Lord of lords. But the rule of His kingdom of over the hearts of men *from every tribe, language, people, and nation.*

Men's great error - we don't see our need. We'd rather have the Mona Lisa, the car, or the million dollars instead of the parachute *because we just don't see*.

The fall of man into sin is why every one of us will die - death is the penalty for sin, but there is much more that we suffer from because of sin and are so often completely blind to - According to God's Holy Word, the Bible: Man is dead in his sins (Eph 2:1), hostile to God (Rom 8:7-8), a God-hater, insolent, arrogant, boastful, proud, selfish, full of envy, murder, deceit, lewdness, hypocrisy, he is an inventor of evil things, he is disobedient to his parents (Rom 1:29-32), he is not subject to God, he cannot bear good fruit (Matt 7:18), he cannot come to Christ (John 6:44, 65), he cannot subject himself to the law of God (Rom 8:7-8), he cannot understand the things of the Spirit (1 Cor 2:14), and he hates the light and refuses to come to it lest his deeds should be exposed (John 3:20).

Application: And therefore, it is not the case that man is in need of a little help here and there, a little coaching here and there. *Men must be born again*. Jesus taught that to the Pharisee, Nicodemus.

John 3:1-3 There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. [2] This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him." [3] Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." ...

Jesus knows full well that the greatest need every man has is to be forgiven and justified before God by believing that He died for us - taking the judicial penalty for our sins in the sight of God, and that He rose again from the dead. And so, Jesus goes on to say to Nicodemus later in this conversation:

John 3:16-18 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. [17] For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. [18] He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

John the Baptist recognized the very same truth and preached it passionately:

John 3:36 "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

The Great Apostle Paul taught the very same thing:

Romans 5:9-10 Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. [10] For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

He also wrote:

Galatians 3:10, 13 "All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law." **[that means the 10 commandments and the Golden Rule too]** Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us..." **[That's what happened at the cross - Christ bore the curse of our disobedience so that we could go free and be perfectly forgiven and go to heaven when we died.]**

Why is this so important? Hebrews 9:27 "Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment..."

Final Application pt 1: Your entire life is a straight line to the very judgment of Almighty God - the One who indeed knows *all* of your secrets, *all* of your thoughts, words, and deeds, and *all* of your motives and actions. Always remember:

Hebrews 4:13 And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.

Forgiveness and reconciliation with God - true consolation and comfort - that is what Simeon was waiting for - and that consolation and comfort would be a person - a baby.

2. The Promise Exceeded - v27-32

[27] So he came by 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, [28] he took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said:

Point: Try to imagine this incredible moment for Simeon. He “came by the Spirit into the temple.” Obviously, the Holy Spirit prompted and guided Simeon to go into the temple at just the right time to fulfill this promise. And for some reason, he walks right up to Joseph and Mary and simply takes Jesus - Jesus at 8 days old - in his arms.

Application: All of the promises that God ever made throughout Biblical history - to Adam and Eve in the garden that the head of the serpent would be crushed by the seed of the woman, to Abraham that his descendents would number as many as the stars in the heavens, that David would one day have an heir to sit on his throne forever... All of these promises will be fulfilled by this little baby boy. The sins of all of God’s people would be laid upon His precious and sinless back. The righteousness which we need to stand before God and be justified before His law would be accomplished and achieved by this little baby boy. The covenant of works which all of us *without exception* have failed to keep would be perfectly fulfilled by this little baby boy.

The promise exceeded: Remember what Simeon had been promised by the Holy Spirit: v26 - “he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ.”

Point 3: Not only did Simeon see the Lord’s Christ, v28: “he took Him up in his arms...” God made good on His promise to Simeon, but he not only saw the Lord’s Christ, he got to hold Him for a moment in his arms and pronounce a blessing upon him.

Application 2: Isn’t this so like our God? He exceeds and goes beyond our expectations. God is a God of *abundant* kindness and goodness. For those who are going to heaven, this will certainly be the case.

3. Jesus, our Salvation - v29-32

[29] "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, According to Your word; [30] For my eyes have seen Your salvation

Point: Simeon knew he would not die until he had seen the Lord’s Christ. And here, as he is holding the infant Child, Jesus, he speaks and let’s all near him know he is ready to “depart in peace, according to your word.”

Point 2: Why is he ready to die in peace? He has seen the consolation of Israel - He has seen God’s “salvation.”

Do you have “peace” with God? Not the feeling of peace, but peace as in *the opposite of war*. We are born as the enemies of God - rebellious against Him and sinful. Thus, we are the enemies of God - we are at war with God. Paul wrote:

Romans 5:1-2 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, [2] through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

When you die *knowing* you are heading to judgement - will you “depart in peace” because your eyes “have seen” God’s “salvation?” How will it go for you when, on that day, every dark secret of your heart is revealed and is brought to light - as Jesus said it would be:

Luke 12:2-3 For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, nor hidden that will not be known. [3] Therefore whatever you have spoken in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have spoken in the ear in inner rooms will be proclaimed on the housetops.

Jesus taught that anger with another person without cause is the same as murder, and that lusting after a woman in your mind was the same as adultery.

God's laws are as unbending as God's own holy character - When God issues forth a command: "you shall have no other gods before Me," or "you shall not commit murder," or "you shall not commit adultery," "you shall not steal," "you shall not bear false witness (i.e. lie)," those commandments are absolute, binding, and they *allow no room for failure of any kind*.

And if that is the standard by which we are judged - then we all need a Savior!

Illustration: So many flatter themselves with the false idea that as long as I'm fairly good *in comparison to other human beings* then surely all will go well with me when I face God.

Application / Reality: The reality is that we *are not judged on the basis of how well we measure up to each other but to God's holy law*. And make no mistake about it, the Scriptures speak with one voice to this issue:

Romans 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Eccles. 7:20 For there is not a just man on earth who does good And does not sin.

Romans 3:10-12 ... "There is none righteous, no, not one; [11] There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. [12] They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one."

Final Application of pt 2: That's why Simeon looked at the Child Jesus he held in his arms at this moment and said: "... my eyes have seen Your salvation."

[31] Which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, [32] A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, And the glory of Your people Israel."

Point: This is why when the text says Simeon was waiting for the "Consolation of Israel" we must not think of that only as the nation of Israel, but rather for all of God's people of all nationalities from all over the world. Jesus was a stumbling block and offended most of the Israelites who were then living anyway - and so, far from being a "consolation" to them, he was an offense.

4. The Revealing of Many Hearts by This Child - v33-35

[33] And Joseph and His mother marveled at those things which were spoken of Him. [34] Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against [35] (yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

Point: Joseph and Mary must have been used to unusual things happening at this point regarding this child, but they still marvelled at this man, Simeon, holding Jesus and saying the things he says here to them.

Notice v34 [re-read it]: Jesus of Nazareth will be one of two things to you: Your fall or your rising. If you repent and believe in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, Jesus will be your Savior. If you reject the gospel and refuse Christ, Jesus will be your judge. Hear the words of Scripture:

1 Peter 2:6-10 Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, "Behold, I lay in Zion A chief cornerstone, elect, precious, And he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame."

[7] Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, "The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone," [8] and "A stone of stumbling And a rock of offense." They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed. [9] But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; [10] who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

Will you believe in Jesus - that He died *for your sins* and submit to Him as Lord, or will you be disobedient and be put to shame - Will you be justified and declared righteous at the day of judgment, or will you be condemned and pronounced guilty when you stand before God?

Notice the statement in the 2nd half of v34: “and for a sign which will be spoken against”

- how many people blaspheme and reject Jesus and His work for man's salvation. How many people “speak against” Him and say, “Oh, there are many roads to heaven, we all end up in the same place, he's just one of many ways!” How many will call Jesus a liar when he claimed in:

John 14:6 “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”? Jesus was spoken against throughout his entire earthly ministry and is still to this day. *Will you be among those who speak against this great sign God has given to man of His love for sinners?* I pray NOT!

Final Point, v35: When it was revealed to Mary that she was indeed pregnant *having never been with a man*, she sang a wonderful song that is recorded in Luke 1:46-55 and is known as Mary's *Magnificat*. In it she praises: “God my Savior.” *She knew* that this Child was the Messiah and the Savior of sinners. She knew He had a special mission... but how could anyone know what Mary experienced when she watched Him crucified?

John 19:25 Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother...

The cross of Jesus “pierced through” Mary's very “soul.” And one of the results of that cross is that “the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.”

Remember Dickens' words at the beginning of this morning's sermon? Remember when he said: “that every beating heart in the hundreds of thousands of chests there, is, in some of its imaginings, a secret to the heart nearest it!”

Application: The cross of Jesus - that event which pierced through Mary's soul - reveals what is in our hearts. The coming of the Gospel - the good news - of Jesus Christ into the world *reveals the hearts of men*. Listen to the commentator, John Calvin:

When the light of the Gospel arises, and persecutions immediately spring up, there is, at the same time, a disclosure of affections of the heart, which had been hitherto concealed: for the lurking-places of human disguise are so deep, that they easily remain hidden till Christ comes. But Christ, by his light, discloses every artifice, and unmasks hypocrisy; and to him is properly ascribed the office of laying open the secrets of the heart. But when the cross is added to doctrine it tries the hearts more to the quick. For those who have embraced Christ by outward profession, often shrink from bearing the cross, and, when they see the Church exposed to numerous calamities, easily desert their post.

Question: When you think about Jesus dying upon the cross and rising again from the dead, what is your response? If you praise God for your Savior's death and resurrection and for the forgiveness of sins you enjoy and the eternal life in heaven that awaits - then that is indeed a wonderful thing. But if you are indifferent to the cross, unaffected by it, unconvicted by your many sins - then you could not possibly be in more danger *even if that danger is entirely undetected by you at the moment*. And so, I warn you now - that the days come and go, they leave us and are gone forever - and every moment of every day, you inch closer and closer to the precipice of hell where you will *justly* spend eternity under the wrath of Almighty God if you know not Jesus Christ as your living Lord and Savior.

Jesus and His cross-work is the revealer of many hearts. What do you believe? Where will you go when you die? Who will answer for your sins? Who will pay for your sins? You, in hell forever? Or Jesus on the cross of Calvary?

I leave you with the promise of the Lord's Christ, the Consolation of Israel who Simeon had been waiting to see:

John 6:47 Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life.