

The Testimony of Simeon, Part 2

Luke 2:29-35

January 24, 2016

As we turn our attention to God's word this morning, we're in Luke 2 :29. Last week Luke introduced us to Simeon. This man Simeon, he invited us to behold this remarkable man. He was a righteous and devout man. He was living in a remarkably dark time. He was living among apostate people in an apostate city. But even in the darkest of times, we see throughout Scripture, God has preserved a remnant. God has continued to give a voice to his own word, a testimony to himself through faithful saints throughout the ages, and Simeon is one of them, along with Anna, who we'll meet next week. They are among the few who make up the holy remnant of believing, faithful Old Testament saints in that time. Joseph and Mary, they're also numbered among that remnant as well. And they all together they demonstrate quiet faithfulness in keeping the law of God. According to verse 39, it says there, "Joseph and Mary did everything according to the Law of the Lord." And you can be sure that theirs was not a mere

external ritual. Their hearts were involved in it. So many in Jerusalem at that time were just going through the motions, if at all. But Joseph and Mary, they had come to worship God. They came to give him thanks. They came to obey his word from a sincere and pure heart.

So by faith, Joseph and Mary have come to the temple, and they've come in obedience to the truth. Also by faith, Simeon and Anna have come to the temple in Messianic hope. The four of them, Joseph and Mary, Simeon and Anna, they're united here in the temple, in the court of the women, united in faith, united in obedience, united in hope. God then brought them all to the temple together to join together to gaze upon the object of their faith, this child that was born, this little baby and they're rejoicing in the consummation of their hope that the child represents. So, they've met here, Joseph and Mary, they've encountered this man Simeon. He was a stranger to them, but they got quickly introduced, and he's now holding their baby.

He's holding the baby Jesus in his arms. And we're about to consider his song. It's called the *Nunc Dimittis*, which is

another Latin title taken from the first line of Simeon's song, "Now, Lord." We've looked at Mary's Magnificat, Zechariah's Benedictus, the angels, they proclaimed *Gloria in Excelsis Deo*, Gloria to God in the highest. And now here Simeon's "Now, Lord," *Nunc Dimittus*, the opening words of the song. Let's read the whole thing starting there in verse 28, Simeon "took the child up in his arms and blessed God and said, 'Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.' And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him."

We'll stop there for now. Simeon's words actually don't stop there. He's got more to say in the next couple verses. But we want to start by taking a closer look at the few short lines of this song. And we need to ask the question, as we look at verse 33, what is it that caused Jesus' father, his supposed father, right? But his father, Joseph, and his mother, Mary, to marvel? Why did they marvel? This young couple had lately been privy to some pretty dramatic revelations. Each of them had been visited by an angel separately. Mary had visited Elizabeth and

Zechariah, and there in their presence she heard prophetic words. She saw for herself the miraculous fulfillment of a promise to a very old couple when their son John was born. And Mary had herself been filled with the Spirit, delivering her own Spirit-inspired song. Joseph and Mary, they had seen for themselves the physical evidence of what had been told to them, this baby that was born in Bethlehem. Any lingering doubts that Joseph may have had about the circumstance of Mary's conception, they seemed maybe dubious to him, but they were all fully and finally answered when the shepherds arrived within hours of the birth to give an amazing report that confirmed everything.

So Joseph and Mary had already been involved in the miraculous. They'd already seen and been involved in the heavenly, the angelic, the prophetic, the Messianic. And you might forgive them for becoming accustomed to the amazing, really, the marvelous and yet verse 33 says they "marveled." Why? Why exactly did they marvel? Some believe that they marveled because Simeon, a complete stranger, identified them, and approached them, and greeted them in such a public place. He singled them out. But as unexpectant as Simeon was, it wasn't necessarily Simeon as a man or the encounter itself that amazed

them. Notice what verse 33 says, They “marveled at what was said about him.” Again, it was the message, not strictly the messenger, but the message, that got their attention. Simeon, he was a stranger to them, but what amazed them was the divine message that he brought. It was the prophetic word that gave Joseph and Mary some new and some unexpected information about the child. In fact, it’s really no overstatement to say that if more people had heard and understood what Simeon said that day, Jerusalem would have been torn in two.

So what was it? What made them marvel at the things that Simeon said about him? We’ve summarized part of it in the first point there in your outline: A marvelous message about universal salvation. A marvelous message about universal salvation. First of all, we mentioned last week, verses 29 to 30, that Simeon’s was a theocentric message. This is about God’s salvation. He says, “Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation.” Back in verse 26, God had revealed to the aged Simeon by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. Again, that term, the Lord’s Christ it refers back to the Messiah, all the promises about the Messiah, this

descendant of David, anointed to be king over Israel, the one who's appointed to usher in the time of the Lord's favor for the nation. The Messiah would rule from Jerusalem, from the throne of his father David. He would be the means of fulfilling all of God's restoration promises to Israel, and that's exactly what he is.

But now, as Simeon approaches Mary and Joseph, as he sees the baby, as he takes him into his arms, Simeon refers to the child not as, the Lord's Christ, but as, your salvation. And that word salvation, the word for salvation, typically is the word *soteria*, but that's not the word used here. It's related. Simeon uses the related adjective *soterias*, which you could translate literally as saving. This is your saving, Lord. Simeon is speaking of the child not as salvation in and of himself; he's speaking of him as the means of salvation. Literally, he's saying, Lord, my eyes have seen your means of saving us. Jesus is the vehicle. He is the instrument by which God accomplished his salvation. And that's why Simeon blessed God, verse 28, and not the child in his arms.

Parents, they were accustomed to rabbinic blessings pronounced on newborn babies. They might have even expected

Simeon's blessing to line up with that tradition, but Simeon didn't do that. He didn't bless the baby; he blessed the God who sent the baby. Simeon looked through the physical reality of a flesh-and-blood, cute-as-a-button baby, like we all do, that he's holding in his arms, and he looks to the God who is salvation. Like, baby was the means of saving. He was the vehicle of salvation, and this is not to diminish Jesus in any way. Simeon didn't have the completed Christology that we have. He didn't have a completed New Testament canon in his hands, but he knew enough to see God as the source of this great salvation. We pointed that out last week, remember?

Simeon was utterly theocentric in his praise: Lord, you, your word, your salvation, your preparation, your people. And listen, that is important because some people can commit an error in their thinking about God. They subtly separate God on the one hand and Jesus on the other, as if God is the brooding wrathful, punishing judge of the Old Testament who is always looking on the world with a scowl. And Jesus is the tender-hearted son in the New Testament. He's the sunshine of love, and he comes in. It's as if Jesus kinda comes in and he steps between his angry father and us poor sinners. It's as if Jesus



is the one who keeps his father's bad temper in check. That caricature could not be further from the truth.

Jesus said, "I and the father are one." He said, "I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me." Jesus is the very embodiment of God's intention to save us. This is God's idea, this salvation, and Jesus is the very vessel of divine salvation. He is the incarnation of God's tender mercy. Salvation is of God. It's wholly of God and it's all of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Salvation is a Triune endeavor from beginning to end. You can't ever separate the triune God and pit them one against the other. That is not true. Simeon saw that clearly, and he saw it quite literally, too. He was holding the very vessel of his own salvation in his arms. And now everything else he said here elaborated on that salvation; it unpacked it.

And it's what Simeon said next, though, that caused Joseph and Mary to marvel. Take a look at verses 31 to 32. He said, "My eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles,

and for glory to your people Israel.” Simeon was praising God for the salvation that he had prepared. That’s a word that refers to getting everything ready; prepared, taking care of all the details. God has prepared all things for his own glory, and his preparation started way before time began. It started before the creation of the world. God has endured objects of wrath prepared for destruction, Romans 9:22, as well as vessels of mercy prepared beforehand for glory, Romans 9:23. That’s us, his people. And Ephesians 2:10 says, God “created us in Christ Jesus for good works, which,” again, “God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” God has done a lot of preparation. He’s done a lot of thinking, and he’s putting it into effect here.

Jesus actually illustrated this word, prepared, when he compared God’s preparation for the kingdom that’s given to those he invites into the kingdom, he compared it to a wedding feast that was prepared and inviting the guests to it Jesus said tell those who are invited, tell them this, “See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast.” Preparing a wedding feast in those days, it was more than a few trips to Safeway, okay? It was more than calling the caterer and bringing

him out. They did all of this, not in front an electric oven or stove or range; they didn't have gas. They were cooking with fuel like wood, things like that. It was a lot of work. For them, preparation involved raising animals and then slaughtering animals and then skinning and bleeding them, butchering the meat. The meat had to be prepared and cooked and proportioned along with all the other things that attended the meal to serve the guests.

Frankly, the kind of hospitality that's assumed in Biblical culture, it's become a lost art in our day. It's hard for us even as a culture to connect with what is meant here as far as preparation. A lot of two-income homes mean you're eating on the fly, fractured families, generational divide, the, the constant barrage of relationship-destroying media. I watch people as they go out to restaurants. Four people in a family and, their, each of them on their phones. They don't even notice the server coming up, hey can I bring you your food? Can you look up long enough to notice me and get your stuff out of the way? I don't know if you've seen that. Wow!

Families barely even eat dinner together anymore. And it's almost become passé to invite people over to the home to sit down around a table to enjoy a prepared meal and quiet thoughtful conversation. In fact, having that kind of silence and having to stare face to face, not at your phone, but stare face to face that's become uncomfortable, right? Often these days it's grab and go. In fact, homes are even being designed these days to keep the kitchen kind of connected to the living room where the big screen TV is set and mounted so you don't have to turn away from the game while you're grabbing your snacks. I don't think that's altogether bad, I mean...

But we ought to have a separate place, right? A dining room. But we in the church, we have the opportunity to learn once again how to live life together. Hospitality is a big, big deal in a biblical home. And as any hostess knows, as any host knows, preparation involves careful planning, as well as the coordination and the time it ensure that all the elements of the meal are ready at the same time. That's hard. And that serves the benefit of providing an enjoyable meal for the guests, which facilitates conversations and builds relationships.

It's fascinating to me that Jesus used that imagery of a host preparing a wedding banquet for guests to reveal the kind of preparation by which God prepared and readied the kingdom. The father had prepared for this salvation. He prepared to bring his beloved Son into the world, and it involved the most complex, most intricately coordinated planning ever. Preparation began in Genesis 1:1 with the creation of a world that would put God's glory on display. It involved the creation of mankind made in God's image, designed to know and appreciate and worship God.

Divine preparation continued even through the Fall with the first promise of salvation coming in Genesis 3:15, continued with the distinction between the righteous and the unrighteous, as Cain brought an unacceptable offering from the ground, the product of his own labor. Abel, on the other hand, he brought a better sacrifice, an atoning sacrifice that involved the slaughtering of an animal, which was acknowledges the penalty of death for sins. That picture was put right into the very first sacrifice.

Divine preparation preserved Noah through an ark. It shows Abram from Ur of the Chaldeans and promised a righteous seed would come through Isaac, not Ishmael; through Jacob, not Esau. Divine preparation selected Judah as the ruling tribe of Israel. Divine preparation sent Israel into Egypt and then drew him out again by miraculous intervention. It provided manifold pictures to illustrate the nature of divine redemption. For as God said, "Out of Egypt I called my Son."

Divine preparation gave Israel the Law of Moses with all its sacrifices and rituals, all its ceremonies and festivals, all picturing Christ, all pointing to Christ, every single one foreshadowing divine salvation in Christ. God prepared for that. Divine preparation gave Israel the fathers and the prophets, gave Israel the priesthood, gave Israel the monarchy. All of that to get God's people ready to meet salvation in the form of Jesus Christ, who is the prophet, the priest, the great High Priest, and the Davidic king.

Divine preparation judged Israel's sin and idolatry, punishing the nation through conquest and exile and then

bringing them back to the land again where they would long and pine and ache for redemption and restoration. Divine preparation readied God's people to have Messianic expectation as they waited and looked as God pointed them to himself as the only hope, the only one who could save and deliver them.

As we saw early in Luke Chapters 1 and 2, divine preparation was even at work among the nations. The Babylonians were replaced by the Persians, who were replaced by the Greeks, who were replaced by the Romans, and all that to set up Caesar Augustus. As the Empire transitioned from a Republic to an Empire, as the first Emperor Caesar Augustus, he makes a decree and he wants a census taken of the land and under the administration of Quirinius. That's what sent the holy family to Bethlehem in the first place, where divine preparation ensured that there would be no room available in the inn except a humble cattle stall, so that the baby Jesus would be born, swaddled and laid in a manger. And why was that?

That prepared Mary and Joseph to receive the shepherds to hear their report. Got them in close proximity to Jerusalem

where we find them now at this point. Man, so many details. Too many details to name and far too complex for any human mind to coordinate. And they say this was written by mere men! Many things revealed in the Old Testament, prophesied hundreds, even thousands of years beforehand, so we could see the divine mind at work, so we would know for certain that God was bringing to pass what he had ordained from eternity past.

Simeon speaks of the salvation God prepared, and it's prepared in the presence of all the peoples. That is a phrase that literally means prepared before the face of, in the presence of, it's before the face of, it's where everyone can see, that is to say, none of this had been hidden; none of it had been done in secret. As Paul said to Festus at the end of the book of Acts, "The king knows about these things For I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this has not been done in a corner," Festus. "What are you going to do about it?" All of this has been laid open for everyone to see. In fact, it's no accident that this very conversation is taking place in public, once again, in the court of the women at the temple. Anyone could have listened in to what Simeon was

saying. But, as every preacher knows, many hear, but very few actually listen, and even fewer still heed the message.

Well, Joseph and Mary they didn't have time, necessarily, to ponder all the significance of what Simeon had just said. No sooner had he spoken of God's preparation of salvation, which culminated in this child, Jesus, than he specified here exactly what he meant by all peoples. And here is where things start to get a bit dicey, from a Jewish perspective anyway . "All peoples" according to verse 32, meant Jew and Gentile. You see that there? "A light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel." Some commentators, myself included, they see light there in opposition to salvation. So, Simeon blessed God for "your salvation that is light." Light . And after that, Simeon puts revelation in parallel relationship with glory. So the two lines would read like this, Light for revelation to the Gentiles; light for glory to your people Israel. The light of divine salvation, it results in two things: Revelation and glory. Revelation for the ignorant Gentiles, glory for the disgraced Jews. Light lifts Gentiles out of the darkness, and light lifts Israel out of the shame and the humiliation that God had subjected them to because of their sin and idolatry.



Salvation God prepared in the presence of all peoples it's a light that binds both Jew and Gentile together in one glorious people of God. That was the intent from the very beginning.

That may not seem very significant to you, a Gentile in the 21st century, living in the reality of the New Testament church here on the other side of the world. But listen, this was a staggering revelation to these two Jews. Even though it had been foretold from ancient days, this was very hard to swallow. God had telegraphed his intent clearly in the Old Testament, going all the way back to the Abrahamic Covenant. God's very first words to Abraham, which are recorded there in Genesis 12:1 through 3, reveals his purpose. He told Abraham, "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and," get this, "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." That's his intent. Going into Egypt, coming out of Egypt, taking up residence in the land of Canaan, all through the monarchy, God intended Israel's glory to draw the nation to himself; all the nations of the earth. It was Israel's failure, then, to fulfill its God ordained purpose that resulted in God's judgment. God judged the nation Israel because they failed to

draw the other nations to God. Then he promised to act on his own behalf.

In fact, turn to Ezekiel 36. I just want to show this to you quickly. Ezekiel 36 is one of the great chapters in the Old Testament because it reveals New Testament realities like spiritual regeneration. It reveals the new birth. It reveals the role of the Holy Spirit, and it's in that context, there in Ezekiel 36:22, in referring to God's intention to save his people, that God identifies Israel's failure to be a light to the Gentiles. So look at it there starting in Ezekiel 36:22.

"Therefore, say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord God, it is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I'm about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them.'"

Seems like God doesn't like that, does he? He doesn't like the profaning of his name, but then he says this, "And the nations

will know that I am the Lord,' declares the Lord God, 'when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes.'"

Again, remember Simeon's words? "Your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all the peoples." God elevated Israel, never for Israel's sake alone, but for the sake of the holiness of his own name. In the sight of all the peoples, all the nations of the earth, God continued, in Ezekiel 36:24, to declare here the New Covenant. He says, "I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the countries, bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules."

Why? Why? Again, to bring glory to his name, to reveal the holiness of his character. Same thing we learn from Paul in the New Testament, which we already read there in Ephesians Chapter

2. Every single saint is the workmanship of God, Ephesians 2:10.

“Created in Christ Jesus for,” what? “Good works.” Why? Because “God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” What’s the point of that? So people can see and observe and know this is the God we worship. We become like what we worship, right? We give glory to him when we live like he wants us to live. And it all started here with Israel.

Back in Isaiah, Isaiah 42:6 to 7, God said, “I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.” Listen, those with blind eyes, those imprisoned in dungeons sitting in darkness, that’s a reference to us. That’s a reference to the Gentile nations. We belong to these Gentile nations of whom Simeon spoke, and in those early days, they were utterly ignorant. They were abysmally lost in darkness.

Here’s where we see more clearly what Zechariah spoke of in Luke 1:79. You can go ahead and turn back to Luke’s gospel. In Luke 1:79, Zechariah promised that this “sunrise from on high”

would “give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.” The Gentiles had no revelation, no Law of Moses of their own. The Gentiles had no prophets visiting them with a word from the Lord. No one calling them back to a covenant obedience. The Gentile nations were, as Paul described in Ephesians 2:12, they were separated from Christ, they were alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, they were strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope without God in the world. God has raised up Israel, as he said in Isaiah 49:6, to be “a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.”

But listen, Israel had failed. God acted then in sending his own son to fulfill Israel's purpose. That was the point. And the child that Simeon cradled in the crook of his arm, he was the very embodiment of that salvation. A light for revelation to the Gentiles, a light for glory to your people Israel. Just a footnote here, notice that in the wisdom of God, God bound together the fate of Jew and Gentile. Isn't that wise? Because he makes them dependent on one another. The Gentiles had to depend on Israel for the light that provides their revelation. And Israel has had to depend on the Gentiles embracing the light

because that's what fulfills Israel's true purpose, which is the nation's true glory. That is how God has united all the people on the face of the earth as one, in mutual appreciation and interdependence. All of our wars, all of our greed, all of our sin are an affront to this purpose. It just reveals our need for his salvation. It reveals how far we've fallen. But in binding Jew and Gentile together there, in that way, God fulfilled an ancient promise to Abraham in you. All the families of the earth shall be blessed.

Listen, before we move on, let's take a moment to reflect on the implications of all of this for us today. First, go back to Simeon's words about divine preparation. God prepared Jesus to accomplish salvation, and as we saw, I mean just the tip of the iceberg, really, that involved an amazing amount of detail and coordination. God's amazing providence was on display in his preparation, which brings glory to his absolute wisdom and his sovereignty over all things. Listen, just on a personal note here, with God at the helm of the universe, bringing everything into conformity with his will, every act, every fact, every molecule, do you think it's possible he's behind the acts and the facts and the molecules in our day-to-day lives, as well?



Certainly, we have every reason to trust him. Even when we don't understand all the answers, even when we don't know where it's all going, we have every reason to trust him, to put our faith in him, to embrace him as our God and Savior.

Second, since our God from the very beginning, since he demonstrated grace and concern and mercy to every single person on the entire earth, that has implications for us as well; how we think about other people, how we treat other people. Listen, all racism, all prejudice, all favoritism, all the tendency toward preferential treatment of other people, that has no place in biblical Christianity. None at all. God's love reaches out universally. Since no one is beyond his concern, no one should be beyond our concern either. Listen, that's not to mean everybody embraces the truth. They don't. But we ought to reach out in love to all people without making any distinctions. The Gospel is a message we should proclaim to all without any distinction.

Third, since God's salvation, which he prepared in the presence of all peoples, brought light for revelation to us

Gentiles, you know what? We honor God by studying and learning what he revealed to us, by knowing it intimately and deeply. God took great pains, if I could put it that way; God is omnipotent, there is no pain in him acting at all. Once he acts it doesn't, to move a mountain or to speak a word, same effort. But he took great pains and many centuries to bring saving revelation to you personally. He sent you a Savior. He gave you a holy book. So don't prioritize lesser things. I mean, really, is what's on TV better than this? No, don't answer that, yes. I will come out there, no. So study the Lord, learn his ways, worship him for his amazing wisdom and grace. It's no wonder Joseph and Mary marveled at Simeon's words, right? They were hearing just how expansive the mission of this child would be, what God intended to fulfill his sweeping purpose for all of human history. And they were probably just a bit confronted in their own national and racial pride. Even the disciples, they thought the salvation was only for them. Only for the Jew. Not so.

No doubt Joseph and Mary had pondered and rejoiced in the fulfillment of Davidic promises in Jesus, but now they had even more to think about, right? How Jesus would fulfill Abrahamic promises as well. All the nations of the earth would be blessed

in Jesus with the light of revelation. And Israel would be glorified in her true purpose. Such a gracious message from Simeon! It could only mean national celebration, right? No more conflict, no more trouble, no more revolts, nor more riots, nothing but feast and festival and rejoicing. Israel would embrace Jesus as Savior and Lord, and they would coronate him as king, and they would live happily ever after, right? Is that how the story goes? Sadly, no.

Simeon wasn't finished, though. After the good news came, some bad news. There's a dark side to the marvelous message of salvation. And as he speaks here directly to Mary, Simeon's words strike a somber note, they take a foreboding tone. This is point two in our outline: an ominous warning of spiritual division. An ominous warning of spiritual division. Sadly, not everyone would embrace the child as Simeon did, with joy and contentment. Take a look at verses 34 to 35, "Simeon blessed them," that is, the parents, "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.'"

This saintly old man, having spoken prophetic words to both of Jesus' parents, he blessed them, understandable, very appropriate. But then he turns his attention to Mary, and he delivers some very troubling news: division, opposition, the piercing of a sword. Before we consider the meaning of what Simeon said, why would he reveal this to a young, rejoicing, celebrating young mother? I mean, why, why now? Isn't this a little heavy for her? Can't she just enjoy the, the infancy of her child? To some it might seem cruel to strap her with this dark and dreadful burden. I mean couldn't she just enjoy Jesus' younger years, rejoice in his infancy, his toddler years, watching him walk and grow and his growing up in the home? What is the point? It's interesting, first of all, Simeon speaks these words to Mary. The text specifies Mary, not Joseph, one of the many reasons it's apparent Joseph didn't live to see Jesus reach adulthood. This profound, soul-piercing sadness would be experienced by Mary alone. And perhaps that is the gracious purpose in what Simeon revealed to her. She needed to know from the very beginning that this child is not her child. He has been God's vessel of salvation with purposes that transcend any of her personal hopes and dreams for her son. The painful separation would cut against the grain of Mary's natural, God-

given maternal instincts. God is here preparing her for the inevitable pain.

And as Luke narrates here, he's emphasized the maternal connection that Mary had with Jesus; natural connection. Simeon has turned to Mary and, though it doesn't say so, the emphasis seems to imply almost that he pulled her aside privately, at least turned to her and not turned to Joseph. It says and Simeon said to Mary, quote "the mother of him." That's literal. See, Mary needed to know that her blessing in giving birth to Jesus, in raising the Messiah in her home, it was a different blessing than any other mother on the earth in all of history or in all of future had ever experienced. She needed to be flexible with her expectations. So better to let her know now so that she knows it's all according to plan. Nothing has gone off track, nothing is being derailed. We wouldn't want to be overwhelmed with grief in the moment of sorrow, lose heart knowing her days with Jesus are numbered. This would even help her to take and treasure every single moment. Not a bad mindset for any parent really, right?

But let's take a closer look at the warning Simeon has just unveiled. First, here Simeon told Mary, you can picture him pointing at the baby, "This child is appointed." This child is appointed, it's the passive voice of the person doing the appointing is slightly veiled, but it's clear that God is the one who did the preparing, and he's also the one who's done the appointing. The child is appointed for two immediate purposes, you can see there, for the fall and rise of many in Israel and, number two, for a sign one that will be opposed, or literally, a sign that would be spoken against.

The first immediate purpose is the fall and rising of many in Israel. The word fall, it's the word *ptosis* and as you can tell from the context, it means more than just tripping and falling to the ground, literally, okay. The word is more comprehensive and final. This is a fall you do not recover from. The idea is utter disaster. It's complete destruction. It's total collapse. The word fall is used only one other time in the New Testament. Also, it's a warning context in Matthew 7:27. Jesus is the one who gave this warning. And he talked to those who listen to his words, but never act on them. A lot of people attending a lot of churches around the country every single

Sunday and they need this warning. Jesus said they're like people who, who hear his words and don't act on them. They're like people who build huge impressive houses, beautiful paint job, three-car garage, place in the back for all of the toys and boats and scooters and all that kind of stuff and they build this big, huge impressive house, but they build them on unstable, uncertain foundations. Their error isn't apparent in good weather. It's not apparent in sunny skies. Their folly is revealed in the storm when the rains fall, when the floods come, when the winds blow and beat against that house. Listen, that's when the foundations are tested, right? If the house is not built on a life of hearing Jesus' words and obeying them, if a life is not built on a habit of faith and obedience, well, then when the trials come, that life will fall and Jesus said, "Great will be the fall." The final word, fall, it's the word *ptosis*.

But Simeon also spoke of the rise of many in Israel, and that's the word *anastasis*, which literally means to get up from a seated or a prone position, but figuratively, this is the word used exclusively in the New Testament for resurrection. Jesus was also appointed to raise some up. Now, obviously there would be those in Israel who would one day fall in the sense of being

judged, condemned for sin, just as there would be those who would one day rise to eternal reward, that was clear, not altogether surprising, but Simeon is saying more than that, much more. The many who were appointed to fall in Israel, their demise happens from a lofty height. It happens from an apparently unshakeable and unassailable position. Everybody thinks, these guys are fine, they'll never fall. The fall Simeon, here, is talking about is completely unexpected. God would topple those who appear to others to be righteous. He would reveal them for who and what they really are.

On the other hand, the many appointed to rise in Israel, they rise up from a lowly position. They rise up from an unnoticed segment of the population. Again, totally unexpected, totally unanticipated. God will reveal the humble for who they are. He will show his approval of the meek. He will elevate them, and the meek will inherit the earth. That's what we read, right in Isaiah Chapter 60 earlier. Their identity is not going to remain hidden. Their reward will not be withheld, and it's an echo of what Mary sang in her song, "God has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; he has

filled the hungry with good things, the rich he has sent away empty." Listen, God appointed Jesus Christ to subvert human expectations, to overturn the proud and to elevate the humble. Those who seem most spiritual, who appear most religious, who put on a righteous face before men, they are the ones God is going to judge because in truth, though the house looks good on the outside, friendly face, cheerful greetings, doing all the right things, serving all the right places, these people, their hearts are actually very far from God. On the other hand, those who are easily overlooked, being poor, humble, softly spoken, meek, people like Simeon and Anna, people like Joseph and Mary, people like the lowly shepherds, those are the ones God will raise up. Those are the ones who quietly obey, and they are the ones who ultimately attain to the resurrection of the dead.

So here's Simeon, sent by the Holy Spirit to remind Mary of what she rejoiced in, that God opposes the proud, and he gives grace to the humble. Jesus is appointed for that purpose, for the rise and fall of many in Israel. He is, listen, he is the most polarizing figure in all of history. If you know the truth about Jesus and you proclaim the truth about Jesus, not just the love part, but the demands as well; not just the tolerance,

though that's there, but also proclaim his deity; proclaim his demands, proclaim his claims about himself; you can't stay neutral. He's polarizing. He creates division. There's a second immediate purpose there in verse 34, Jesus is appointed for a sign that is opposed. As I said, the word opposed, it literally means spoken against. It's the preposition *anti* plus the verb *logo*, to say or to speak. So it's to speak against.

Repeatedly in Jesus' ministry, the scribes and the Pharisees dogged his steps, seeking a sign, perhaps it's better to say they were demanding a sign from him in Matthew 12:38 to 39, "Some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him saying, 'Teacher we wish to see a sign from you.' But he answered them, 'An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.'" He said that after he'd performed many miracles in their midst." But looking beyond all that, demanding a sign. Again, Matthew 16:1, "The Pharisees and Sadducees came, and to test him they asked him to show them a sign from heaven. And again, Jesus said, 'An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah.'" They

demanded a sign. Jesus refused to cater to their demands. Why? Because he himself was the sign.

That's exactly what Paul meant in 1 Corinthians 1:22 to 25 when he wrote, "Jews demand signs, Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to the Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. The foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men." Listen, Jesus is the sign who will be opposed, to be spoken against. He's the catalyst that exposes the true division that already exists. Jesus is appointed to divide humanity into two camps. That's the immediate purpose. But notice there in verse 35, there's an ultimate purpose. "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed." Those are the two immediate purposes. Then the end of verse 35, "So that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed." God sent Jesus to winnow Israel, to sift Israel, ultimately to judge Israel. His scrutiny and his judgment go directly to the heart and they expose motives, they reveal intentions. They broadcast hidden opinions to bring everything to the surface. Because of Jesus, people's

true thoughts, they are no longer able to be hidden. God will examine everything in the blazing light of his holiness. Jesus, he came to divide Israel, separating them into the sheep and to the goats. Those who embrace him in repentance, faith, loving obedience, those are his true sheep. And those who reject him, those who hear but don't obey, they're the goats. They're the ones who will suffer his judgment, and great will be their fall.

Now, don't forget the context. Again, Simeon spoke these words to Mary, the mother of Jesus. Tears had to fill her eyes. Even then, as she looked down at this perfect, tender flesh of her precious baby, how could anyone reject him? It doesn't make sense and that's exactly right. It doesn't make sense. How could anyone reject him? If anyone rejects Jesus, the perfect Savior, you know what? His condemnation is proven. His condemnation is just. Beyond a shadow of a doubt, the condemnation on that individual is proven to be righteous, and God is the righteous judge. But still, don't forget, I mean, you rejoice in that fact, that's good. But don't forget that all of this would be very, very painful for Mary. God's justice would be demonstrated, but this would hurt her deeply. And I believe Mary's sadness and pain, as a parent, as a mother, it's just a

small picture of God's pain and sadness in this. The deeper the relationship, the deeper the sorrow, right?

Notice again this parenthetical warning given to Mary personally in verse 35, "A sword will pierce through your own soul also." That speaks of an almost unbearable, unmerciful, soul-destroying pain. The word for sword there is not *machaira*, the typical Roman short sword, the 18-inch one worn by the infantry. This is the *rhomphaia*. This is the large, broad sword that was wielded by mounted cavalry. It was a long, heavy sword designed to come crashing down from a mounted position on infantry soldiers and smash through helmets and armor and just slaughter; inflict mortal wounds.

A *machaira* would have been enough to penetrate Mary's tender heart to pierce her delicate soul, but a *rhomphaia* seems like overkill. This pictures a penetrating grief that would shred her soul, that would tear it to pieces. And that is exactly what happened at the crucifixion. As Mary stood at the foot of the cross, as she watched the flesh of her dear firstborn son torn apart by Roman nails, it's impossible to

imagine the agony that had to have been for her, helpless to come to her son's aid, helpless to do anything in the presence of mocking soldiers, her own mocking country men, suffering and dying. Division was appointed in Israel and Jesus was appointed to be the focal point. That division would result in violent opposition, causing pain and sorrow. The human pain and sorrow, it's just a picture of the divine sorrow in the rejection of Jesus Christ. But folks, that was the cost of our redemption.

And that brings us back to the marvelous message of universal salvation that we share in rejoicing with others. It's all summed up beautifully in Peter's words in 1 Peter 2:6 to 8. Peter, there, combines the two prophecies really from Isaiah that speak of this, highlights two opposite responses to Jesus Christ. He combines Isaiah 8:14, a passage about Israel's rejection, with Isaiah 28:16, a passage about those who believe. It's a wonderful message. 1 Peter 2:6-8, "For it stands in Scripture: 'Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.' So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,' and, 'a stone of stumbling and a rock

of offense.' They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to."

Everyone wants the marvelous message and who can blame them, right? But once they've heard it and their sin is exposed, their pride is revealed, their motives are confronted, their sinful thoughts are exposed and rebuked, some respond in stubbornness and pride and they will fall and great will be their fall. But others respond in humility and repentance, in meekness and obedience and you know what? God will raise them up. It's no wonder Joseph and Mary marveled, right? So do we. God's gospel is an awesome gospel. It cuts to the very depths of our hearts and it creates division, folks. It creates division, that's the point. It divides humanity into two groups, only two. And it's not Democrat and Republican. It's those who oppose and those who embrace. We see that happening around us. It's painful, isn't it? This division of the gospel and of Jesus Christ, it separates friends and loved ones sometimes, doesn't it? But those who embrace the message, those who embrace Christ, those who embrace God's salvation, they are eternally blessed in God. He's enough for us. And you know what? Those are our people, aren't they? Those are our people.

Let's close in prayer. Heavenly Father, we rejoice in your salvation as Simeon did. He delighted, was rejoicing, overjoyed to see your salvation in the person of Jesus Christ physically before him. He saw, but he was a believer before he even saw your salvation. And Father, we also believe without seeing. We long one day to have our faith become sight, to see and lay hold of that for which we were laid ahold of by Christ Jesus. We give all praise, honor and glory to you in Jesus' name. Amen.