



Boxing Day Sermon

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Luke 2:22–40

I. Introduction

By the time you read this, you will have celebrated your Christmas Day with family and friends. I hope your day was a memorable one. This Christmas will be Jo and my 2nd Christmas in Auckland. Last year I preached during Christmas. It was my first service as a pastor at Milford Baptist. This year we hope to host at our home here in Milford as well as see some of Jo's family in Auckland.

This past Christmas season has been an interesting one for me. This year we celebrated the Advent season by encouraging one another to see God's hope, love, joy and peace for us and the world. As I was preparing for Advent, I became aware that the Church through its history had celebrated the Christmas season a bit differently than we do today. Jim Milmine noticed this as well and mentioned it in his reflection of Advent during one of our services.

Jim mentioned that the Church used to first prepare their hearts for the return of Jesus and then reflect on the importance of his birth. Two weeks of Advent would be used to help participants prepare their hearts for Jesus' return. The two following weeks were for the celebration of Jesus' birth. What struck me about this new insight on the history of Advent, was how little I was allowing God to prepare my own heart for the return of Jesus.

I had spent all of my life thinking only of Jesus' birth during Christmas. I grew up on Christmas movies, songs and even in churches where we only talked about Jesus' birth. In fact, until this year I don't think I ever connected Christmas with Jesus' return! But is this connection, Christmas with Jesus' return, a natural one? Was the Church in the past wrong for including Jesus' return with the Christmas celebration?

To answer that question, it may be helpful to take a look inwardly at our church or at our own experiences growing up in the church. When I started following Jesus, while living in Hawaii, I attended a non-denominational church. Our leadership emphasized the importance of sharing the Gospel with others. The Gospel was the good news that Jesus died for the sins of the world to bring peace between humanity and God.

Because of this emphasis, I was encouraged to share my faith in Jesus to my colleagues at work and to students when I later enrolled in university. But after a few years at the church, I noticed a problem. I didn't know what to do for those I shared the Gospel with after they came to faith as well! The only thing I could tell them was to go and tell others about their own faith in Jesus.

Our church was doing great work for those that attended, but we were weak in building up peoples' lives in a great number of other areas. Were we a church family that engaged with the poor in our area? Were we wise stewards of our finances so we were able to support not only our families but the needs of others in our community as well? Were we meeting the needs of others even when they did not wish to follow Jesus themselves? Had we, had I mistakenly reduced my walk with Jesus to only a very narrow set of tasks?

I had and I think I had the same problem with regards to Christmas. I was looking at the holiday in a very limited way! To be sure, we all feel the Spirit's joy to celebrate the birth of the Saviour of the world. That event is worthy of the world's praise! But that event isn't supposed to be the only focus of the Church. Our focus is also supposed to be fixed to the future when Jesus returns as King over creation.

Remember it was Paul who said, "I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection...not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me" (Phil 4:10–12). Paul wasn't just focused on Jesus' death on the cross. He was focused on sharing in Jesus' life to its fullest. In Phil 1, he said that this fullness of life in Jesus was to be made perfect when Paul would leave this life to be with him. Paul's goals were set on the future.

And so, this Christmas season I saw in myself the wrong goals set for the season. No longer is Christmas a season to only celebrate Jesus' birth. It is also a season to reset my heart on the future, where our inheritance truly lies. In today's account of Simeon and Anna we will see models to follow in this regard. Models who show us how to celebrate what God has done and also what God will do in the future.

II. Context

First, let's look at the context leading up to today's account. We may remember that the Gospel according to Luke starts with God's preparation of His people to receive His Son. God sends an angel to a priest named Zechariah to tell him that his wife, Elizabeth, would have a child. This child would be filled with God's Spirit so that he might "turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Luke 1:17).

God then sends an angel to Mary who tells her that she will also bear a son, but that this son will be the Son of the Most High and he will have an eternal kingdom. In the second chapter of the book, an angel appears to shepherds and tell them of "good news that will bring great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord" (Luke 2:11).

In these events, God is leading His people. He is preparing their hearts for the future. Elizabeth and Mary will have sons and God will direct their sons to reveal His future plans for them. The next event described is our account at the Temple in Jerusalem. Here God has been creating hope within the hearts of Simeon and Anna. He has been building in their hearts a vision for the future redemption of Israel and the nations. When Mary and Joseph take Jesus to the Temple to observe common purification rites as required by the Law, they will hear God's words to them. The son that was born to

them will bring salvation and a kingdom of peace that will have no end. In this passage we will see God proclaim to future blessing of Jesus for humanity in three ways.

Jesus...

- 1.) ...would be the consolation of Israel
- 2.) ...would reveal God's truth on Earth
- 3.) ...would bring a future completed salvation

III. Unpack

1.) Jesus Would be the Consolation of Israel

In Luke 2:25–33, we see that God's Holy Spirit had already been working in Simeon before Jesus was brought to the Temple. The Spirit had already told Simeon that he would see God's salvation for Israel before he passed away. When Jesus is brought into the Temple, the Spirit reveals to Simeon that God's word to him has been fulfilled. Simeon takes Jesus into his arms and says,

²⁹ *“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,
you may now dismiss your servant in peace.*

³⁰ *For my eyes have seen your salvation,*

³¹ *which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:*

³² *a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and the glory of your people Israel.”*

Certainly Simeon is thrilled to see Jesus the baby in his arms. But who does he see in the infant? What has the Spirit revealed to him? Of course he knows that Jesus is the gift of salvation, a light of revelation to the Gentiles and glory of the people of Israel. But is this salvation already accomplished? No, Simeon has the eyes of God given through the Spirit of God. Simeon can celebrate the birth of the infant Jesus seeing that there will come a day in the future that this infant will accomplish the goals set by God in heaven.

God is allowing Simeon to see as He does. It is God, who at the fall of Adam and Eve, projects hope. Looking at the sin and disobedience of his first children, knowing that creation and all future generations will suffer under the slavery of sin, God promises that one day an offspring will be born who will defeat evil and restore God's blessing. God's eyes saw in the offspring of Adam and Eve, salvation. And He will direct history from then on toward fulfilling that goal in creation.

2.) Jesus Would Reveal God's Truth

In Luke 2:34–35, we see that God not only allowed Simeon to see what the infant Jesus would accomplish in the future, He also allowed him to see the light of truth he would speak as well. This light of truth wasn't a warm and comforting light. People wouldn't hear from Jesus uplifting platitudes or encouraging words. Jesus would reveal truth, the truth of what lies within the heart of all humanity. And because humanity loves the darkness because it can hide their evil in the darkness, Jesus would expose to all what was being hidden.

Simeon saw in Jesus not a Saviour that would one day save “good and decent” people. Simeon saw a Saviour who would reveal the darkness and rebellion against God in others. He saw that his Saviour wouldn’t be readily received. His words would be a sword that cut to the deepest parts of our hearts. He would reveal what we hide. He would do this in order that he might save. How can he save if humanity continues to hide their rebellion and hatred and pretend that they are all “basically good?”

One of the most fascinating things about the Scriptures is how it depicts its “heroes.” David is described as a man after God’s own heart who defeated the enemies of Israel. He is also described as the man who murdered his own countryman in order to sleep with his wife! Peter is described as a leader of the early church. He is also described as the one who abandoned Jesus during his greatest time of need! Why are these great flaws mentioned in God’s word? Because these men of the Bible are not the “heroes” of the Bible. God is! What we have in David, Peter, Mary, Abigail and others are examples of humans who seek to follow God and yet who continue to struggle with their sin. We see the faithfulness of God, the Heavenly Father fulfil His promises in creation regardless of our rebelliousness.

Simeon sees in the infant Jesus, a real Saviour who will not merely ignore the reality of sin in our hearts. He will speak the truth in order that he might expose sin. In exposing sin he can then forgive it!

3.) Jesus Would Bring Completed Future Salvation

In Luke 2:36–40, we see the prophet, Anna, who worships in the Temple night and day. Who, though as the text says is “very old,” is being guided by God’s Spirit to wait for God’s salvation. She is doing more than waiting for it, she is fasting and praying for it! Just like Simeon, when she sees Jesus she knows that this is God’s salvation. God guides her to not only see salvation in Jesus, but to joyfully make God’s salvation known to those around her! God’s power is filling Anna’s body now that she sees the salvation she fasted and prayed for night and day in the Temple.

Like Simeon, God has given Anna the ability to see the significance of what Jesus would be in the future to the nation and world. But unlike Simeon, Anna is described as telling all who were also waiting for God’s salvation. Anna knows that she isn’t the only one who senses God’s Spirit and who as a result waits for God’s Kingdom to be established on earth. Others are longing for it as well. Others continue to meet at the Temple fasting and praying, longing for God’s rule over them.

Anna, in this way, is the precursor of the disciples. The disciples meet Jesus when he is already establishing his Father’s kingdom. Anna is different. She prepares hearts for the future when Jesus will one day reveal His father’s words and works in Israel. In some sense Anna is more like us today than the disciples. We are disciples or followers of Jesus, but we wait as Anna did for a day when Jesus will establish his Father’s will on earth.

IV. Application

What is our application for today?

1.) Where is God directing our eyes?

We have all celebrated the birth of Jesus this Christmas and Advent season. But are our eyes looking for the future of his return? What if all of us were like Simeon and Anna, filled with God’s Spirit and

waiting for God's final work of redemption when Jesus returns in glory? Then our hearts would be future oriented and we may find ourselves speaking the words of Paul who spoke to the church in Philippi saying,

For to me, to live in Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labour for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith...(Phil 1:21–25)

May this Christmas season be a time where we decide we will no longer just praise God for the birth of Jesus. May our eyes be directed by His Spirit so that we see in Jesus' birth, his future reign over creation as King. May we allow God's Spirit to draw our hearts like Simeon and Anna to that future hope.

2.) How is God directing our lips?

We can all attest that it is easy to say only what others want to hear. It's safer as well! But in telling others only what they want to hear, are we following Jesus? Are we instead following others? Maybe it's normal to keep the "peace" and not speak the truth. But are we following Jesus or what the culture calls us to?

Simeon saw that Jesus would speak the truth because the Spirit of God showed him that. We know that the Spirit of God speaks to us today. He tells us to speak the words of Jesus, the words of truth. Humanity is at odds with God's Kingdom. Humanity is guilty under God's righteousness. These are true words, which the Spirit directs God's children to speak. To be sure, we should speak them humbly as sinners ourselves.

Why is that significant? God wishes to restore humanity to Himself. He doesn't desire that people follow us! If we call people sinners and pretend that we are righteous we communicate that people should follow us! Instead, God wishes to show gentleness. He sends people like Simeon and Anna, like us who are just like everybody else. He sends us so that others will see God's gentle approach in their lives. God hides the glory of His truth in broken vessels like us. When we speak the truth we point to God as the source and not to ourselves.

3.) Who is God directing us to?

God desires to open our eyes to the future day when Jesus will return in glory. And the glory that He reveals to us is meant to fill us with such joy and love that would cause us to tell others. We can't follow the belief of the world that says that everyone is basically good and not in need for forgiveness and salvation. We must be filled and follow God's Spirit allowing him to set our eyes on the future, speak the truth to others and joyfully tell all what God has done and will do in the future when Jesus returns in glory.