

Luke 2: 33-35; “This Child – A Sign”, Sermon # 9 in the series – “The Prophecies of Christ’s Birth”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on December 25th, 2022, in the Morning Worship Service.

This morning we thought about Simeon being providentially led by the Holy Spirit, to come into the temple at the very time that Joseph and Mary brought the Baby Jesus there, to dedicate Him to the Lord. Simeon took Jesus up in his arms and He blessed God and said to Him – Now I know Lord, that You are going to let me depart in peace, according to Your word. He was saying to God – You have fulfilled Your promise to me that I would see Your Christ before I died.

Joseph and Mary were marveling at the things which were spoken of Christ, by him. But Simeon went on in his prophetic speech to tell Joseph and Mary something which perhaps they did not want to hear when he said – Behold this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against.

So, at this time, I want to bring to your attention to what this Child was destined to become, which was a sign. 1st of all – He would become a sign to those who were to fall in Israel. 2nd – He would become a sign to those who were to rise in Israel. And 3rd – He would become a sign also to His mother Mary but in a way which would show forth a mother’s love for her Child. Let’s see if we can understand these things better as we look at them more closely.

1st of all – He would become a sign to those who were destined to fall in Israel.

What is the sign that is being talked about here in verse 34? When it says: This Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed, what does it mean? Well, I believe that God through Simeon was giving Mary and Joseph a sort of a short preview of how Jesus’ earthly ministry would be received by Israel. The unusual circumstances of Jesus’ birth, that Mary was a virgin, would no doubt lead many people to speculate as to whether she really was a virgin. And if it was so, if it were the truth of the matter, what would that mean concerning Jesus?

Well, it would mean, if they were understanding it correctly, that Jesus had no sin. And that he would be everything which had been prophesied to be, by Mary herself, and Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, who also had been visited by an angel. He would be the Christ; their Messiah. The return of the revelatory gift of prophecy, being given to some in Israel, was a sign of Jesus’ true identity; that He was the promised Messiah, the One who would be the fulfillment of the many prophecies given to the fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This was also prophesied of by king David in many of the Psalms, and also by many the prophets during Old Testament times.

In John 1: 29, it says that when John saw Jesus coming toward him, He pointed Him out to the multitudes, and he said, ‘Behold!’ ‘The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!’ Now, it is apparent that the religious establishment of the day, the scribes and the Pharisees, were not anticipating this kind of an appearance of Christ. And the reason for it, their seeing it as sign to be opposed, was that that the message which they heard John preaching to them was that they too, as religious men, needed to repent and believe in Jesus. John was requiring that both they themselves and everyone that they had taught to trust in their own righteousness, had to stop doing that. John was saying that they needed to repent and be baptized for the remission of their sins.

And this they did not believe that they needed to do. Neither did they want to believe in Jesus who did not want to place Himself under their supposed spiritual authority. So in Luke chapter 3, verse 7, it says that John said to the multitudes that came out to be baptized by him, ‘Brood of vipers!’ ‘Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?’ But he did give instructions to the people about what repentance was supposed to look like. And then in verse 15 it says – Now as the people were in expectation, and all reasoned in their hearts about John, whether he was the Christ or not, John

answered, saying to all, 'I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am no worthy to loose.' "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."

So it appears, that from this time forward, it was the case, that ministry of Jesus was not being received by all that many people in Israel. With many it was the fact that He was saying that He was the Son of God. The fact that He was doing miracles of healing the sick, casting out demons, and even raising the dead should have convinced them of this. But to the leaders and the people who were self-righteous, it was a sign, not to be received by them, but to be opposed. And oppose Him they did.

We need to understand that, as Simeon said, this Child Jesus was appointed for the fall of many in Israel; that is, those who saw the Lord Jesus as a threat to their being able to continue on in their self-righteous pride, and self-justification, in regard to all of their religious practices which Jesus came to condemn. For although the Lord Jesus did not come into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. It was nevertheless true that He did come to reveal the falseness of the religious system of the scribes and Pharisees which was leading people astray.

And what was even worse was their rejection of His being the Son of God, the Son of the Father, the One sent into the world to save them from their sins. In John chapter 10, verse 25, Jesus said to those Jews who asked Him if He was the Christ – "I told you, and you do not believe." "The works which I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me." "But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep," "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me." "And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand." "I and the Father are one." "Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him." "Jesus answered them, 'Many good works I have shown you from My Father.'" "For which of those works do you stone Me?" "The Jews answered Him, saying, 'For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God.'"

So here we see the crux of the issue. All of Jesus' words and all of His works evidenced in every way that He was the Son of God; that He was one with His Father, and as such God. And yet, they would not believe it. This is why they would fall in Israel, and they would not rise. It is interesting to note that when Simeon spoke this prophecy of how Jesus would not be received by many in Israel, that it is prefaced with the words – "And Simeon blessed them".

In other words, Simeon was trying to tell them that even though it might seem like one of the most strange and incongruous of things to assert that the Christ would not be received by His own people the Jews. Instead it would be true that He would even be spoken against and persecuted, and eventually put to death for all that He told the people. Our text says that this was the appointment of God. Let us praise God today then, that these things were ordered in just this way.

For if these things had not been appointed by God, in just this way, then our redemption could not have been accomplished. It is a sad thing to contemplate, that our sins were so great that our loving Savior had to go through great sufferings at the hands of false and sinful religious men. But out of His love for us, He had to come to the place that He would have to die on the cross to bear them on our behalf. But this is how it was.

2nd – Our Lord would become a sign to those who were destined to rise in Israel.

"Behold, this Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel..." When Simeon said that many would rise in Israel, it means that they would be saved from their sins because they would believe in the Lord Jesus and they would rise to become His followers. By believing His teaching and receiving Him to themselves as their Savior and Lord, they came to understand that it was by His powerful working in their hearts that they would be raised from their death in trespasses and sins. And they were made alive by the Holy Spirit in the New Birth. You find a good example of this in the man Nicodemus in John chapter 3.

In John chapter 3, verse 1 it says that there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.” “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.’” Here we see the beginnings of Nicodemus’ faith in Christ, even though Christ Himself would have to build it here. In just a moment we will see just how little he knew of spiritual things. He did understand that Jesus was a teacher come from God, because no one could do the miraculous signs that Jesus did unless God was with him. This was a perfectly right conclusion.

It was indeed a sign to Nicodemus that Christ was from God because could do these mighty miraculous works. But instead of responding to the correctness of Nicodemus’ analysis, Jesus immediately says to him – “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Jesus is saying this to him – Nicodemus, you see what I have been doing as a sign that I have come from God.

But you do not understand that your being saved does not depend on your powers of intellectual deduction. It is going to require something much more than this for you to come to know God and have eternal life, Nicodemus. It is going to require that God have mercy upon you, and that you be born again. If you are born again, then you will be able to truly see the kingdom of God; that salvation from sin and knowing God and living a life pleasing to Him means that your heart, your mind and your soul will have to be changed by the Spirit’s working. Nicodemus is utterly perplexed by this kind of language. He takes Jesus’ words literally and physically. He says to Jesus – “How can a man be born when he is old?” “Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?”

Jesus explains it to him in spiritual terms in verse 5. “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” “That which is born of flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” “Do not marvel that you must be born again.” When He says that one must be born of water He is speaking of being born again by the word of God; the washing of water with the word, and being made clean by the word that Jesus gives to you. And this washing, this renewal of the mind, takes place by the Spirit’s working. He gives light and spiritual life to the person whom God would save and bring to Himself.

When this takes place the sinner is cleansed and enters the kingdom of God. A person cannot be born again by the strength of their own wisdom or their keen intellectual discernment. The carnal fleshly mind is enmity to God. But as Jesus said in John 3: 5 & 6, this is not something to marvel over, that you must be born again. You must see the truth of the sovereignty of God in salvation. The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.

Nicodemus at this point, was greatly perplexed. He said – How can these things be? And Jesus had to ask him – Are you the teacher of Israel and do not know these things? And then He went on to preach to Nicodemus the gospel in John 3: 16-21. Nicodemus was having a hard time receiving Jesus’ testimony. But eventually he did, and He rose from his death in trespasses and sins, and was savingly brought to Christ. He saw the glory of Christ. And he began to follow Him. It was Nicodemus who at first came to Jesus by night, who also came later, at the time of His death, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds of it.

Both he and Joseph of Arimathea took the body of Jesus, and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the custom was. The secretive fearful man became a bold follower of our Lord. And of all the Sanhedrim of that day, it is his name alone that is written down for us to remember in the Scriptures. He was one of the many who rose in Israel, because He believed the sign of the evidences of Christ’s Deity and His great love for sinners that they would rise to eternal life.

3rd – He would become a sign also to His mother Mary but in a way which would show forth a mother’s love for her Child.

Verse 35 – “Yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.” You can imagine what must have gone through Mary’s mind at this time. Her thinking – How can my Son, who has had so many good things prophesied of Him as being the Savior of Israel, and the Savior of the World, and yes, my Savior too, eventually bring His mother’s heart to feel this kind of pain? A sword will pierce through my own soul also? What does this mean? No doubt, she knew in part; that He would be a suffering Savior for His being a perfectly righteous Man in the midst of the many sinners that He had come to save. But little did she know the awful cost.

She realized it fully at the cross. John chapter 19, verses 25-27. “Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.” “When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, ‘Woman, behold your son!’” “Then He said to the disciple, ‘Behold your mother!’” “And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home.” It was here at the cross, that as His mother, she felt the pain of the sword entering her soul.

It was this great pain that her son, the Lord of glory, whom the Holy Spirit formed in her womb, and whom she carried until His birth at Bethlehem, and birthed Him in a stable, and laid Him in a manger, should have to be treated in this way. But it did make sense to her. I think that she must have remembered the event of that same night, when the shepherds came and told her the message of the angel. “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people.” “For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord.” “And will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, and lying in a manger.” Now, even though she felt this great pain in seeing her son on the cross dying, she really understood now, that He was dying for sinners everywhere, sinners in every generation of the world. She remembered the time when the angel told her that she should not be afraid, that she had found favor with God, and that she would, as a virgin, conceive in her womb and bring forth a Son, and that she would call His name Jesus.

She did not understand then, and she asked – How can this be since I do not know a man? And the angel explained to her that the Holy Spirit would come upon her and the power of the Highest would overshadow her, and the Holy One who would be born of her would be called the Son of God. And so even though she felt this sword of pain in her soul for all that her pure and holy son was going through, she knew that He was going to be victorious in His death. And even though she did not understand the outcome of all this, she believed and entrusted both Him and herself to God. And Jesus knowing her pain, entrusted her earthly care to the disciple that He loved.

Jesus did overcome sin and death at the cross. And today we know Him as our Savior; the One who loved us and gave Himself for us. The thoughts of many hearts have been revealed, and they will keep on being revealed until all the sinners whom Christ died for, and who have received His redemptive work on their behalf, is completed. At the cross Jesus endured unimaginable pains for our sins, and He bore them all triumphantly. And as He died, His mother no doubt heard him cry – It is finished.

She now knew that He had to suffer these things so that He would enter into His glory. She was a witness of these things, and she would be a witness of His resurrection. And she would continue in prayer and supplication with the 120 disciples in the upper room until the day of Pentecost, when she would see Christ’s Church born. And then she knew that all had been fulfilled and all would be fulfilled in the great ministry of her son.