

The Presentation of the King
Luke 2:22-35
 Pastor Jason Van Bommel

22 And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord²³ (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord”) ²⁴ and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.” ²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous 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. ²⁷ And he came in 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,

*29 “Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace,
 according to your word;*

30 for my eyes have seen your salvation

31 that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

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

33 And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him.³⁴ And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed ³⁵ (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.”

- Luke 2:22-35, ESV

Introduction: What Does a Godly Life Look Like?

“Yeah, but does he pass the eye test?”

This something you’ll sometimes hear in the sports world when people are talking about certain athletes who have great stats, great numbers, but the question is still being asked whether they are truly great or not.

I was watching a video last week of an NBA player who has great defensive stats, but they showed clip after clip of him just standing there, arms to his side, while players drive right past him to dunk or make an easy layup. The analyst said this player was the classic case of looking good in the analytics and stats but not passing the eye test.

Yes, I love sports. I know some of you had your eyes glazed over during that illustration, so I’ll try another one.

Standardized test companies have been experimenting with having computers grade essays, with mixed results. One submitted sample showed that a writer could get a high score from the computer by using the right combination of clauses and phrases and sentence structure, even if the content was utterly meaningless. Another test submission received a perfect score from the computer, as it brilliantly explained how Germany was

successfully able to win World War 2. It turns out that, when it comes to knowing what makes for truly excellent writing, human beings are still required after all.

An athlete can have impressive stats and lack greatness. A writer can get a perfect score from a computer and be completely wrong. What about a godly life? What about righteousness and godliness? How do we measure such things? Is there a formula, like the sports statisticians' analytics? Is there a computer model that could analyze someone's life and determine whether or not the person is a godly, righteous person or not?

We're often tempted to reduce godliness to a list of do's and don'ts: I do read my Bible and pray daily. I don't commit great and notorious sins. The old Southern Fundamentalist credo was simple: Don't smoke, don't drink, don't chew and don't go out with girls that do. So, is godliness a mere matter of checking all the right boxes every day? No, of course not.

When it comes to righteousness-as-box-checking, no one was better than the Scribes, the Pharisees, and the priestly class in Jerusalem. And yet, with very few exceptions, they are never held up as models of godliness or righteousness, and they were the ones responsible for killing the Lord Jesus.

On the other hand, modern evangelical Christianity has emphasized the heart in a sentimental way that overlooks or minimizes outward behavior. We quote I Samuel 16:7, "*man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.*" And then we say, "Well, God sees my heart," meaning, "God knows that I love Him and my intentions are right, so it doesn't matter how I live my life." And under this mindset, all of the outward measures of devotion to God – church attendance, Bible reading, Bible knowledge, righteous behavior – have slipped sadly low among American evangelicals.

American Christians often think of themselves as more devout and devoted than their outward behavior would show. For example, while polls indicate that 40% of Americans say they attend church every week, the reality from studies shows that only 23-25% of Americans actually show up to church at least 3 out of every 8 Sundays. That means, instead of 130 million Americans being committed weekly church goers, the real number is closer to 50 million. Other measures, like giving and regular Bible reading, have also been steadily declining, even as people continue to report that they are very committed to their faith.

So, what do we do? We don't want to be Pharisaical box-checkers and yet we don't also want to be blindly subjective and pretend that our outward behavior has no relationship to our inward heart attitude. What does godly living look like? Well, in today's passage, we have three people we can look at – Joseph and Mary and Simeon. If we kept reading, we could include Anna, too, but her case is a bit more extraordinary. So, we're going to look at Joseph and Mary as godly parents and Simeon as a godly man this morning.

I. The Presentation, vv. 22-24

22 And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord²³ (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord")²⁴ and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons."

Here we have a simple description of what Joseph and Mary do with the baby Jesus about 40 days after He has been born. They are still staying in Bethlehem, so they make the five-mile journey from Bethlehem to the Temple in Jerusalem to offer two things:

- I. **They present Him to the Lord.** This presentation is made because "*Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord.*" When God brought Israel out of Egypt, the final plague was the

death of the firstborn, which God protected Israel from if they marked their homes with the blood of the Passover Lamb, as recorded in Exodus 12. Then, in Exodus 13, the Lord told Israel that all of their firstborn belong to Him, and that the firstborn animals are to be sacrificed to the Lord while the firstborn sons are to be redeemed by them from the Lord. To do this, they would give 5 shekels to the Lord. This is what Joseph and Mary were doing then they presented Jesus to the Lord.

2. **The made the sacrifice of purification, to end Mary's time of ceremonial uncleanness.** This is spelled out in Leviticus 12, where a woman is told she is unclean for 7 days after giving birth to a male, at which time he is circumcised on the 8th day, which was done for Jesus in verse 21. Then, she continues unclean for another 33 days. So, in this passage, Mary and Joseph are coming to the Temple after 40 days to offer the sacrifice of purification for Mary, which would be a sin offering and a burnt offering. The normal sacrifice required was a year-old lamb for the burnt offering and then a young pigeon or turtledove for a sin offering. Joseph and Mary bring two birds, which is the offering God allowed a poorer couple to make who could not afford a lamb. [By the way, I think this shows that that wise men from the East did not come until at least after the 40 days, because if Joseph and Mary had already received their gifts, they would have had more than enough money to buy a lamb.]

So, what do we see here in Joseph and Mary? One of the ways the Bible teaches us what's important is by repetition. Well, three times in three verses, we have this key idea repeated: "*according to the Law of Moses,*" "*as it is written in the Law of the Lord,*" and "*according to what is said in the Law of the Lord.*" Joseph and Mary did what was written in God's word. They were faithfully obedient to the Word of God.

Last week, when we saw that the time was fulfilled for Mary to give birth, I referenced Galatians 4:4, which talks about Jesus coming "in the fullness of time." Here's Galatians 4:4-5:

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. (ESV)

And how did Christ "redeem those who were under the law"? By fulfilling the requirements of the Law in Himself as one who was "born under the law" to fulfill the Law for His people!

The first step Jesus took in fulfilling the Law came in His circumcision, which was also the first time His blood was shed by the hand of man. It was at the time of the first shedding of His blood that He was named "Jesus," The LORD is salvation. Now, His presentation to the Lord as the firstborn is the second step in His fulfilling the Law. Here He is presented as the firstborn, and two things are in view: a redemption price is paid, and remembrance of the Exodus and the Passover Lamb is recalled to mind. Joseph and Mary did not sacrifice a Lamb that day, but they held the fulfillment of the Passover Lamb in their arms, the One who would pay the full redemption price for all of God's people in Himself.

So, even at 8 days old and 40 days old, Jesus is fulfilling the Law for His people. And yet the first several steps Jesus took in fulfilling the Law were very much dependent on His parents' faithful obedience to the Word of God. Jesus was a helpless baby. Joseph and Mary were faithful and obedient to God's word.

II. The Prophetic Song, vv. 25-33

As Joseph and Mary come in faithful obedience to God's Word, they are met by Simeon:

Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous 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. ²⁷ And he came in 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,

²⁹ "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace,
according to your word;
³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation
³¹ that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,
³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and for glory to your people Israel."

Simeon is a fascinating man of God. He is described to us as being "righteous and devout." Righteous here probably refers to his just conduct, his righteous way of life. Devout refers to his heart's disposition toward God. We sometimes use the words righteousness and holiness interchangeably, speaking of someone who is righteous and someone who is holy or Godly in the same way to refer to a "good Christian," but the words are slightly different in their orientation and emphasis. Here we see that Simeon is upright in his conduct and devoted to God in his heart, so he is both righteous and holy, righteous and devout.

We don't know much about Simeon. We can surmise from the text that he was probably a layman, not a priest, and that he was probably old. Now, the text doesn't explicitly tell us either of these things, and last week, I made a big deal out of reading things into the text that are not there. But there's a difference between imaginative speculation about what's not in the text and reasonable inference from the text. If Simeon was in the Temple as a priest, Luke would surely have told us that, as he did with Zacharias. Also, Luke tells us that Simeon had been waiting for the consolation of Israel, that he has been told that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Christ, and Simeon responds by basically telling the Lord he's now ready to die, because he had seen the Lord's Christ. All of this makes it fairly safe to infer that he was an old man who had been waiting a long time. He seems to expect that he's not going to live to see the child grow up.

So, what's special about Simeon? Well, with Joseph and Mary, we had a three-fold repetition of the Law of the Lord, do we have any similar three-fold repetition with Simeon? Yes, we do! In three verses, we read three references to the Holy Spirit: "*the Holy Spirit was upon him*," "*it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit*," and "*he came in the Spirit into the temple*." Interestingly, this third reference to the Holy Spirit in Simeon comes right before a fourth reference to the fact that Mary and Joseph are acting according to the Law!

So, if from Joseph and Mary, we learn the importance of faithful obedience to the word of God, from Simeon we learn the importance of the Holy Spirit. Simeon seems to have a rare place among Old Testament believers, in that he did not hold an anointed office, like prophet, priest or king, but the Holy Spirit was upon him – as would be the case for all true believers after the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost. This makes Simeon a good model for New Testament, Holy Spirit-indwelt believers.

Simeon was righteous and devout, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. Perhaps we should understand that Simeon was righteous and devout because the Holy Spirit was upon him, for surely it is the Holy Spirit who enables and empowers the people of God to live Godly lives in Christ Jesus. We ask new members to promise – "in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, to endeavor to live as becomes a follower of Christ."

And what did this look like in the life of Simeon? Well, it looked like waiting, seeing, and singing. He took the promise of God seriously and he waited. He waited patiently and expectantly. Then, when God kept his promise, he saw it. He saw Jesus and knew He was the Lord's Christ, the long-awaited Messiah. He had Spirit-given insight. Then, in response to what he had been promised and he had been shown, he erupted in song! Simeon sang, "*my eyes have seen your salvation*"! [If you want more on Simeon's beautiful and powerful song, get the sermon I preached on it two years ago.]

So, what about you? Have you heard the word of God's promise? God has made precious promises to you if you belong to Him by faith. Have you recognized that these promised – of forgiveness, adoption and eternal inheritance – have all been fulfilled in Christ? Have you seen what Paul saw in 2 Corinthians 1:20, "*For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory.*" And if you have seen that the promises of God have found their Yes in Christ, have you responded in faithful joy by singing Amen to God for His glory?

Does the Holy Spirit dwell in you? Does His fruit show itself in your life in patient waiting on God, eyes of faith that see the promises of God in Christ, a voice of strong praise to God for His faithful goodness, for His salvation?

III. The Prophesied Piercing, vv. 34-35

Our passage does not end with Simeon's joyful song, however:

³³ *And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him.*³⁴ *And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed* ³⁵ *(and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."*

In this last section here, we see first that Joseph and Mary marveled at Simeon's song. They were not just obedient to the Law without thinking or caring. Earlier, in response to the shepherds, we read that Mary treasured all of these things, pondering them in her heart, and here we see Joseph and Mary both marveling at what God is revealing through Simeon about their baby boy.

Then, Simeon blessed both of them and said to Mary in particular some very puzzling and troubling words. "*This child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel and for a sign that is opposed.*" Jesus brings about the decisive crisis for Israel. As Israel's leadership rejects and crucifies Him, they bring about their own downfall. As they oppose Him, they fulfill the promises about Him from Isaiah 53:3 –

*He was despised and rejected by men,
a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;
and as one from whom men hide their faces
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.*

And yet Simeon has hard words for Mary herself, very personal words, too: "*a sword will pierce through your own soul, too.*" Why only Mary and not Joseph? Well, a mother's love is certainly special, and as Mary stood at the foot of the cross watching her son die, she suffered a grief no one else could. But also, Joseph had probably died already before Jesus died on the cross. So, Joseph was spared that agony which Mary bore alone.

Here we see clearly that faithful obedience to God's word does not guarantee a life free from pain. In fact, it might bring a life of greater pain, of greater hardship. As Christians, we now carry the sign that it opposed.

China has recently been cracking down on Christians in China, and one of the things they have been doing is destroying crosses. Some reports are that hundreds of thousands of crosses in the Henan Province alone have been burned or destroyed, along with Bibles and church buildings. Muslims and Jewish people who convert to Jesus are regularly disowned by their families, alienated from their communities, fired from jobs, forced to leave their homes, etc. Jesus calls us to take up our cross and follow Him, and this often means a life of greater shame, rejection and hardship, but it should be a joy to us to suffer for the sake of Christ because it means that we bear His name, His sign.

Will Your Eyes See Your Salvation?

I want to close by asking you a simple question: Will your eyes see your salvation? This is at the heart of Simeon's joy. He was overwhelmed for God had made a precious promise to him and had kept that promise. Simeon took the baby Jesus into his arms and sang,

*“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”*

If you can see Him by faith now, the promise is that you will see Him by sight later. But if you will not see Him by faith now, when you see Him by sight later, He will not be your salvation but your fall, your judgment.

So, will your eyes see your salvation?

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ² Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears^[a] we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.³ And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. – 1 John 3:1-3, ESV