

My Eyes have Seen your Salvation

Luke 2:21-40

Turn to Luke 1. Earliest Christian teaching was historical teaching not doctrinal. What the actual followers of Jesus first taught the new believers was stories of Jesus.

The people who were with Jesus, who put their trust in him and lived in his ways, were not taught that at church. They weren't taught it anywhere. They actually met a person, Jesus of Nazareth. They were attracted to him, they followed him around, they listened to what he taught and saw what he did, and what others did to him.

What they actually saw and heard persuaded them to put their trust in him, to worship him, to live in his ways. What they actually saw and heard slowly convinced them that this Jesus was the Holy One of God, the Christ that God sent into the world, the one person to trust and obey.

So what did they teach new followers? They taught history, they told the stories about Jesus, what he said and did, that had persuaded *them*. They assumed, if *we* heard the stories, *we'd* be persuaded too. They told us the stories that convinced them to trust and follow Jesus.

Luke 1:3-4 (Ed's paraphrase) *I carefully investigated everything, and decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.*

Luke was a second generation Christian. He was not one of the crowd that followed Jesus, but he was one of those who listened to the actual followers. He heard the stories, and read them, from those who actually saw Jesus and heard Jesus. Luke was persuaded by these stories, he put his trust in Jesus as the Saviour from God, and he decided to live in his ways.

And he wrote it down, so that Theophilus and we would know the certainty of the things we have been taught. We've been taught that God sent Jesus, taught to trust in Jesus, and obey him. That's what Theophilus was taught, and what we've been taught. And what we've been taught is right. And Luke wants us to know the certainty of this, so he writes what actually happened.

The Christmas stories are written so that we will take a careful look at what actually happened when this child Jesus was born, and we will realize that trusting him and waiting for him to return is a good idea. The Christmas stories are written, just as the other stories, so that we may know the certainty of what we've been taught about Jesus the Lord.

The stories are written to encourage us in our faith. The Christmas spirit, for Luke, is being confident that our faith in God and his Christ is the wisest choice we ever made. Reading these stories about Jesus is God's way of strengthening us in our certainty.

Now, let's read 2:21-28. Listen for the Law of the Lord, and listen for the Holy Spirit.

Luke 2:21 On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise the child, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived. ²² When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ²³ (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord"), ²⁴ and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons."

²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. ²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah.

²⁷ Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, ²⁸ Simeon took him in his arms and praised God. ... ³⁹ When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth.

Joseph and Mary went to the temple in Jerusalem to buy back Jesus from God. When God brought Israel out of Egypt, the last plague on the Egyptians was the death of every oldest son and every oldest of the livestock in Egypt.

After that, God said to Israel, "I saved your oldest firstborn, but from now on the oldest firstborn is devoted to me. But you can bring a sacrifice and redeem him back from me." Later God took the Levites in place of the oldest firstborn, but the people still needed to buy back their firstborn from God. Samuel became a priest, though he wasn't Levite, on the basis of being the firstborn.

Our text mentions the Law of Moses five times. Three of those it is called "the Law of the Lord." Jesus was treated in complete obedience to the Law of the Lord, the Law of God.

What this Scripture wants to show us is that Jesus grew up in a Jewish home and a Jewish community that was devoted to God and to the Law of God. To those people, loving God and loving his Law were inseparable, and Luke the Gentile writer has the highest respect for this. In the temple and in obedience to the Law was where God found the people he wanted to use.

So they are in the temple, keeping the Law of the Lord, and in comes Simeon, and we read three times in three verses that the Holy Spirit was guiding Simeon and was a normal part of Simeon's life. Luke is what we'd call a charismatic. He likes the Spirit's working, he likes prophecy and tongues and especially the filling of the Spirit where someone speaks God's words.

For Luke, the charismatic Gentile, wholehearted devotion to the law of God and obedience to the temple ceremonies is the perfect place for the Holy Spirit to work. In the next story we read that Hannah, the same kind of godly Jew serving in the temple, was herself a prophet.

There is no tension or conflict between devotion to the Law of the Lord and the free working of the Holy Spirit, between temple piety and anointed prophecy. For Luke the Gentile, this is the perfect place for the Spirit to work. The Spirit can work anywhere, let's make that clear.

But sometimes we talk as if strict obedience to the Law of Moses and to God's temple ceremonies somehow rules out the Spirit, or puts the Holy Spirit at a disadvantage. That's our prejudice. The Holy Spirit worked freely in those surroundings.

The rest of this sermon will be in three parts: 1, Simeon's first speech; 2, Simeon's second speech; and 3, Hannah the prophet.

²⁸ *Simeon took Jesus in his arms and praised God, saying:*

²⁹ *“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, 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.”*

My eyes have seen your salvation. The Spirit had told Simeon that he would not die before he had seen the Messiah. And the Spirit also told Simeon, “this baby is the one.” Simeon held a 6 week old baby in his arms, and said, “Now dismiss your servant in peace, for my eyes have seen your salvation.”

I encourage you to give this full force. We are saved by a person, Jesus the Christ, the Lord. At the simplest level, we are not saved by the cross, or saved by a death. We tend to think the only real problem is our guilt, so then we are saved by the sacrificial death of Jesus.

Our guilt is not the only problem, and Jesus in obedience to God did much more than just die. We are saved by a person. When we seen the person, we've seen God's salvation. His job was to save us. How got that done is secondary.

How he saves us is his business, though we are told much about that. We are saved by a person. Jesus saves his people. When Simeon looked at baby Jesus said, “my eyes have seen your salvation,” that was entirely correct.

For my eyes have seen your salvation, 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.*

This first speech of Simeon tells us what God was doing by sending Jesus. The second speech of Simeon tells us how people will respond to Jesus. The emphasis of this first speech is the Gentiles. The surrounding is entirely Jewish: the law of the Moses, the temple, sacrifices, Simeon was looking forward to the consolation of Israel, Hannah speaks to those looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

But the baby is for all the nations, a light of revelation to the Gentiles.

What kind of life were your ancestors and mine living, on the day Joseph and Mary brought Jesus into the temple? I don't know, but not good. But God made sure Jesus that was brought to all the nations, and that light of revealing God came to my ancestors and yours, and here we are.

Simeon said this on that day. God has given us an orderly account of these things, *so we may know the certainty of the things we have been taught.*

Simeon's second speech. Simeon's first speech told us what God had given, a salvation for all the nations, God through Jesus revealing himself to Gentiles. The second speech tells us how this will effect people.

³³ *The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him.* ³⁴ *Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother:*

*“This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel,
and to be a sign that will be spoken against,
³⁵ so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed.
And a sword will pierce your own soul too.*

Jesus made God known like God had never been known before. God came to us and lived with us and showed us what he was like. Jesus bringing salvation was a light of revelation to the Gentiles. AND in the same way, Jesus makes people known like we had not been known before.

When people come in contact with Jesus, they show their true colours, always. And there are surprises. *This child will cause the falling and rising of many in Israel.* At the Last Supper in Luke, Jesus told the 12 that in his kingdom, they would sit on thrones, judging the 12 tribes of Israel (Lk 22:29-30).

They wanted Jesus and stuck with him, and will rise to the top. Others were at the top but did not follow Jesus, did not want him, and they fell a long ways.

A sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. People will see the salvation that God prepared for all the nations, they will see the glory of Israel. (The glory of Israel is that the nation Israel gave Jesus to the world, that is the glory of Israel.)

People will see the salvation God prepared for all the nations, they will see God's light of revelation to the Gentiles, they will see the glory of Israel, and they will speak against all this.

Mary, get ready for this, says old Simeon. And all of us here, get ready for it, Simeon said it about our Lord more than 2000 years ago in the Jerusalem temple.

God gave us Jesus to show us what He was really like, and when we meet Jesus we show what we are like. People we'd expect to be noble and want the true God turn out not to want him at all, they speak against him. And people who seem dark and we do not expect to want God, when they meet Jesus they do want God! In this way we reveal the thoughts of our hearts.

And Mary, a sword will pierce your own soul too. This one is not hard to figure out. Mary would see a lot of anger and criticism aimed at her son, ending up with a shameful execution. About as bad as it could get for a mother, I expect.

God has given us an orderly account of these things, *so we may know the certainty of the things we have been taught.*

Now Hannah. ³⁶ *There was also a prophet, Hannah, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, ³⁷ and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. ³⁸ Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.*

³⁹ *When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. ⁴⁰ And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.*

Why does Luke include this story, since he does not tell us what Hannah said? Probably he means us to see that two witnesses spoke for God in the temple about Jesus, not just one. Hannah was a prophet, and she “just happens to” come up at that moment, and she also speaks to people there about the child. Two godly and anointed people proclaim that Jesus is a special baby.

The NT likes witnesses to come in twos, since Moses said one was not enough.

I read over the 20 verses many times this week, and I was perturbed that Luke had not included the words Hannah spoke. He gives us Elizabeth's speech, and he gives us Mary's speech, why not Hannah's? I was miffed. How am I supposed to speak to you about Hannah when we're not told what she said?

Then I noticed that Luke is more interested in who was listening to her: *all those looking forward to the redemption of Israel.* I will paraphrase that for Gentiles: *all those looking forward to God's coming deliverance.* Hannah spoke to all those who were waiting for God to do what he promised.

It says this about Simeon, too, v25. He was looking forward to the consolation of Israel, he was looking forward to God's coming deliverance. Jesus is for people who watch and long for God's coming deliverance. Waiting is a big part of what God's people do. Simeon and Hannah were old, and had spent their whole lives waiting. That's how the righteous live.

In 1 Thess 1, Paul summarizes Thessalonian faith this way: *you turned from idols to serve the living God, and to wait for his Son Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.*

Our life is built around two things: we serve God, and we wait for Jesus. Period. That's our task. And we do this in a world destined for God's wrath. We serve God, and we wait. That's what Simeon did his whole life, that's what Hannah did, and those were the people who listened to Hannah speak about Jesus.

The two speeches of Simeon are probably the most important things in our text. One, in Jesus God shows himself. Jesus is God's salvation made known to all the nations, Jesus is a the light of God's revelation to the Gentiles.

Two, when people meet Jesus, they make themselves known. When people bring Jesus to us, we make ourselves known. That is equally true for those who want him and those who do not. Simeon knew many would speak against him; that has always been a part of this picture.

Luke's words: *I carefully investigated everything, and decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.*

Let's put this in God's mouth. *I have arranged an orderly account for all you who love me, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.*

Let us continue to serve this God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath. Amen.