

**BACK TO THE BIBLE SERIES: A Hope-Filled Christmas**

**By Pastor Bryan Clark**

**Message Title: Call His Name Jesus Pt. 2**

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Verse 22:

And when the days for their purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “EVERY first-born MALE THAT OPENS THE WOMB SHALL BE CALLED HOLY TO THE LORD”), and to offer a sacrifice according to what was said in the Law of the Lord, “A PAIR OF TURTLEDOVES, OR TWO YOUNG PIGEONS.” (\*NASB, Luke 2: 22-24)

Pretty straight forward here: The first born was to be offered to God for service—was dedicated as holy to God. Probably the idea of two young pigeons or turtledoves would have told us that Mary and Joseph would have been relatively poor. This was a gift of somebody in the poorer social class.

And there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Spirit was upon him. 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. And he came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to carry out for Him the custom of the Law, then he took Him into his arms, and blessed God, and said,

“Now Lord, you are releasing Your bond-servant to depart  
In peace, according to Your Word;  
For my eyes have seen Your salvation,  
Which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples,  
A LIGHT OF REVELATION TO THE GENTILES,  
And the glory of Your people Israel.” (Vs. 25-32)

Simeon was quite a remarkable man. The text describes him as righteous and devout. He was among the faithful that were waiting for the coming of a Messiah. Now again imagine four hundred years of silence and all that’s transpired, and the Holy Spirit comes to Simeon and says, “You will see the fulfillment of this promise before you die”. What a remarkable statement! So, Simeon has been waiting. The text tells us that the Spirit led him to the temple and led him to the identification of Jesus as the promised Messiah. I love what it says in Verse 29. “Now Lord, you are releasing Your bond-servant to depart in peace.”

I think there's more to this than just simply the fact that Simeon had seen the promised Christ or the promised Messiah. There is a message in his words for all of us. The fact of the matter is we all are ultimately going to die. Unless Jesus returns before we die, that is the end for all of us. As a pastor I've sat by the bedside of many, many people as they die. The fact of the matter is that there are those who die in peace, and there are those who die in agony. And it comes down to whether or not you have seen the Messiah—whether or not you have recognized that it's not on the basis of your good works, not on the basis of your religion, not on the basis of anything you can do, but because we could not save ourselves, Jehovah became Salvation. God became flesh and it was His blood that was spilled in forgiveness for our sins. So, when Simeon says that he can depart in peace, for he has seen the promised Messiah, those are words for all of us. Because it's only when we have recognized that God became flesh and died that we might have life, that we ourselves are ready to die and can depart in peace as Simeon has said.

Verse 30, My eyes have seen Your salvation.

Verse 32, A light to the Gentiles and the glory of Your people of Israel.

Clearly Simeon says from the beginning that salvation is for all people.

And his father and mother were amazed at the things which were being said about Him. And Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed—and a sword will pierce even your own soul—to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed." (Vs. 33-35)

It's a very interesting couple of verses here. This is the first time in the Christmas story that the news is bad. Imagine Mary and Joseph being stunned by what was just said here. Up until now, you've had the message of the angels; you've had the message of the shepherds; you've had all this wonderful, encouraging message of salvation. But now Simeon, acting as God's prophet, says the ...child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel and for a sign to be opposed. He goes on to say this one will actually expose the thoughts of the heart. What is he saying there?

He is offering a prophecy that would be fulfilled in the lifetime of Jesus, right up until present day. And that is that Jesus would be the great divide among people. That—when God became flesh and walked among us—there would be those who would oppose Him, those who would reject Him, those who would ultimately execute Him.

Now think about that for a minute: God, perfect in every way, becomes flesh and walks on this Earth and people hate Him and ultimately people execute Him. That's what Simeon is saying. He's talking about the pain that it's going to bring to Mary and he's saying, ultimately, it will reveal what's in the hearts of people.

What he was talking about was this: Religion creates an environment where I convince myself that I can make myself acceptable to God. It is a form of self-righteousness, and self-righteousness is fed by this desire deep within us to be our own god, to run our own lives, to call our own shots. "I'm going to do it my way." It's very popular in our culture today to say, "All roads lead to God." I was watching a news special and some survey had come out saying that religious people were happier than non-religious people. So, they had a debate between a

Catholic Father and an atheist, and I thought to myself, “This is the most ridiculous debate.” It is not religion that makes people satisfied; it’s not religion that makes people joyful. What they were saying is, “As long as you believe something, you’ll be happier than those who don’t.” And God has said from the beginning it doesn’t work that way. It’s not true that all roads lead to God. What is true, is that God made a promise, and God has a plan, and for thousands of years, God has been unfolding His plan, and it was fulfilled in the person of Jesus, when God Himself became a man, in order to shed His blood for the sins of the world.

Jesus was the ultimate un-religion. The very fact that Jesus became flesh was a statement religion doesn’t work. But, as Jesus began His public ministry, He began to expose the self-righteous nature of religion. The religious people realized that, “Either we have to surrender to Jesus as the Savior, or we must eliminate Him.”

Throughout history Jesus has been the ultimate divide between those who are willing to say, “I need help”, in brokenness and humility to say, “I can’t do this myself. I can’t accomplish this myself. I cannot be self-righteous. It’s only through what God has done for me, that I can experience His forgiveness and salvation.” That’s not a position of self-righteousness; it’s a position of brokenness and humility—a willingness to say, “I need help”. That’s why Simeon said it would expose the thoughts of men’s and women’s hearts—because deep down in all of our hearts, we have one of two options. Either in brokenness and humility to say, “I need a Savior; I cannot do it myself,” or—with that desire within us to be our own god to say, “You know I’ll do this myself,” —which is the world of religion.

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Verse 36

And there was a prophetess, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years and had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple, serving night and day with fasting and prayers. At that very moment she came up and began giving thanks to God and continued to speak of Him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. (Vs. 36-38)

Anna was a prophetess that basically lived in the temple. If you do the math, she was probably a hundred and four or five years of age. At this point in her life, all she did was fast and pray. There’s a great reminder for all of those who are entering into that later season of life: That the case can be made that the most productive time in Anna’s life was her final season, as she had time to dedicate herself totally to fasting and prayer for the kingdom of God. It’s very important to remember that it may be our final season where we are most productive—as we can dedicate ourselves ultimately to the things of God.

She recognizes that this is God’s Messiah, and then I love what she says, she ...continued to speak of Him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. In other words, what she is saying is, that she is spreading the news to all those who were longing for the Messiah to come and set them free. Yet how many of those were willing to listen?

It's sobering in my mind to remember that, when God became flesh and walked on this Earth, His ultimate opposition was not the secular world. It was religion! It was religion that had Him crucified on the cross, because Jesus is the ultimate competition to religion—which is driven by self-righteousness.

We've just come through the Christmas season. Millions and millions and millions of people sang the songs. The Christmas carols are loaded with right theology—some of the most theologically correct songs we sing. The whole story is there; the whole message is there. People longing for the coming of the Messiah—to set us free: “I don't want to live one more day in this emptiness, this loneliness, this despair, this bondage.” And yet, when Jesus came to the First Century world, most of His people rejected Him.

I'm going to suggest to you that out of the millions and millions and millions of people that just celebrated Christmas, the same is true today. They're lonely; they're empty; they're in despair; they're in bondage. They're struggling with addictions to alcohol or drugs; they're messing around with pornography; they're involved in sexual relationships, materialism, status, money, workaholics—however you want to describe it.

We live in a culture that is a mess. It's driven by the fact that people are looking for something; they're crying out for something that will satisfy. We just went through the season. We just went through the celebration—the reminder that the Messiah has come. He offers everything that you're looking for and yet tomorrow, for the overwhelming majority of those people, it will still be the same. The same struggle, the same despair, the same loneliness, the same addiction, the same bondage, and you have to ask the question, “What are you not getting here?” Two thousand years later, not much has changed; we still don't get it.

Everything you're looking for is what Christmas is about. God did the work. God became flesh—Jehovah Is Salvation. He shed His blood to forgive your sins that you might have a relationship with Him now and forever. Ultimately what you're searching for is that relationship with God—which is the only thing that will ultimately satisfy.

My appeal would be to those of you who would admit you're still looking—you're still searching. You have addictions. You have this drive to somehow satisfy whatever that is deep inside that you know is missing and you know is empty and you're still trying to fill that cup. What is it about Christmas that you didn't understand? What is it that you don't get? Don't you realize that God has done everything necessary? All you must do is, by faith, simply receive His gift of Salvation. Why is it that most people will go back to life as usual? The answer is, because deep down inside we are determined to be our own god. “I'll do it myself; I'll do it my way.” So even though we say we're looking; we're searching; we're desperate and we're trying to find something, the core of the issue is a pride and an arrogance that says, “I simply will not give up. I will not admit I can't do it myself”. The only way to receive God's gift of salvation is through brokenness and through humility and through a recognition that I need help.

My prayer in preparing for this message is that there would not be one single person still searching for what has already been freely offered. It's there for you to receive by faith. That's what Christmas is about.

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Cara: Bryan, the Bible gives us a good picture of the excitement that Simeon and Anna felt when they met the Savior. Meanwhile, there's people all around them that missed Jesus altogether, because they're just too busy with life, too busy with their religious sacrifices. Same thing's happening today.

Bryan: Yeah, so again, just imagine the people around Jerusalem and in that whole geographical area, that were desperately looking for what Jesus had come to offer, and they completely missed it, and yes, the same thing happens today. It's never more obvious to me than at Christmas time. The message is everywhere, and yet people won't listen. People miss it. It's like people that are dying of thirst and the water is freely given and they just refuse to drink it.

Arnie: Mary and Joseph couldn't even afford to bring a lamb to sacrifice, yet they arrive with the ultimate sacrificial lamb right in their arms. That's crazy.

Bryan: Yeah. What an amazing moment. I doubt they were completely aware of what was to come. I mean, how could they really have imagined what all was to come? But I think they did understand they were offering the greatest gift of all.

Cara: Simeon's news must have sounded awfully grim. He basically said that the life of Jesus was going to divide people. It would cause great pain, but then he says that it will also reveal what's in the hearts of people, and we definitely see that reaction to the Gospel today.

Bryan: Yeah, we absolutely do. I mentioned in the message, it's really the first time there's negativity in the Christmas story, but there is a reality to this. John writes in his Gospel, Chapter 3, that Jesus is the true light and people don't like that. People prefer darkness. Why do they prefer darkness? Because their deeds are evil. They want to hide. It's like Jesus is this mega flashlight that shines into people's lives and exposes the rats, and people don't like their rats exposed, and so they want the light to go out, and so Jesus makes people very uncomfortable.

Arnie: Bryan, you pointed out that Anna's later years may have been the most productive time in her life. That's so critical to remember. You never get too old to serve.

Bryan: No, you never get too old to serve. And one of the interesting dynamics of the church culture in America today, is one of the largest dropout demographics in the church is 55 and older. [Yeah, it is.] They're dropping out at an alarming rate, and that's just really a loss for them. But it's a real loss for the church. We don't want these people to drop out or to check out. They have more wisdom. They have more life experience. They tend to have more time. Even if they don't do anything but pray. There's amazing power in prayer. Often, they have more resources than at any other time in their lives. There's just so many ways the senior population can enrich a

local church, and for all of our listeners that fall into that demographic, I would plead with them to not drop out, but to offer the church the depth of what they have to offer.

Cara: You see so much humility in the story of Jesus. Philippians tells us that he is in the form of God, but then it says He made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant born in the likeness of men and being found in human form. He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Bryan, He did that for me, for you, for Arnie, and for every person that is listening. Why?

Bryan: Yeah, the why is a great question. I think oftentimes we as Christians struggle to embrace not just the plan of salvation, but the riches of the inheritance of what we have in Christ. Because we can't figure out the why, and that's where Ephesians 1:6 has been really, really helpful for me. Paul says, "To the praise of the glory of His grace", and so the message of Ephesians is, "You were dead. You had no hope, you couldn't help. So, God stepped in, and on the basis of His grace, has made you something absolutely magnificent." Why did He do that? To the praise of the glory of His grace. The more He's lavished His riches upon you, the more magnificent you have become, the more it puts His grace on display, and the more praise He receives. So, part of it is realizing, it's not about me, it's never been about me. It's about God putting His grace on display. I'm simply the recipient.