

## Lk 2:33-35 Hidden Christmas

*Tim Anderson 2/1/2022*

We've been looking at the hidden meanings of Christmas, and today's reading is one that's not ever going to make it onto the Christmas cards. In fact, you roster it for the Sunday after Christmas because it jars so much with our expectations of what Christmas is about. But there's no question this is a Christmas passage. The baby Jesus is only a few weeks old. The Old Testament commanded some sacrifices to be made. Mary and Joseph had headed up to the temple to make the required sacrifices. But unlike most couples who could make the sacrifices without incident, Mary and Joseph were met by some godly old people who spoke words over the newborn child. And today we just look at one set of words spoken by Simeon. There can be no question it's a Christmas passage. These events occurred around the birth of Jesus. So why aren't they read out each year at Christmas time? Well listen to the Christmas message. And the Christmas message is, "Jesus came to bring judgement, conflict and suffering as well as salvation." That's not going to be printed inside your cards anytime soon. But we need to be honest about these things. So we will tackle them in turn.

Judgement.

"This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel." Jesus didn't come to leave things at the status quo. The world would not be same after his coming. Some who were great when Jesus came will be brought low. Others who were insignificant when Jesus came will be raised up.

Jesus comes as one who reverses fortunes.  
Well this prophecy of Simeon was not a big shock to Mary.  
She had indeed spoken similar words herself.  
Lk 1:52-53 "He has brought down the rulers from their thrones  
but he has lifted up the humble.  
He has filled the hungry with good things  
but has sent the rich away empty."  
Mary was praising God the Father.  
Simeon was saying,  
what is true for the Father will also be true for the Son.  
Jesus will be the instrument of God's judgement  
on some who are great in the eyes of the world.  
And he will be the instrument of raising up some who are humble.

Well we can see that clearly in Jesus' ministry.  
Those who were powerful, like the Pharisees and Sadducees,  
Jesus called out for their sinful hearts.  
But fishermen, he raised up to positions of prominence.  
Now it might seem a bit of an exaggeration  
to say that Jesus caused the falling of the Pharisees  
or the rising of the fishermen.  
But if you take the long view,  
it is pretty clear.  
Within a couple of decades of Jesus death and resurrection,  
the Pharisees didn't exist anymore as a religious grouping.  
Those who walked around in their long flowing robes  
were consigned to the history books.  
And within a couple of decades of Jesus' death and resurrection,  
Peter, the fisherman, was a leader of a movement  
that would sweep the Roman empire over the next 300 years.  
But we also need to view Simeon's prophecy spiritually.  
Jesus would also be the catalyst  
for pushing people into the place their hearts belonged.  
When Jesus began his ministry,  
the Pharisees looked for all the world  
like they had hearts that were right with God.

Their reputation for righteousness and prayerfulness  
was second to none.  
Everybody thought that they were the apple of God's eye.  
But in fact they were not.  
You can see what God thought of them by what Jesus said about them.  
God's thoughts and Jesus' words are one and the same thing.  
And Jesus was not complimentary about them at all.  
He called them among other things:  
hypocrites, blind guides, blind fools, whitewashed tombs,  
and a brood of vipers.  
That wasn't Jesus having a grumpy day.  
That was God's thoughts  
about the spirituality of the Pharisees being revealed.  
By contrast, who are the people who Jesus' praised?  
Well take for example the Syrophenician woman.  
She was definitely at the bottom of the spiritual stack.  
She was the wrong gender for starters.  
Jews looked down on women.  
She was the wrong nationality for seconders.  
Jews looked down on non Jews.  
They weren't God's chosen,  
how could they achieve spiritual greatness?  
Her daughter was possessed by a demon.  
Well that has to mean her family are spiritually suspect.  
But she approached Jesus to drive out the demon.  
Jesus told her that he was only sent to the lost sheep of Israel.  
It's not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs.  
And she said to him,  
"even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters table."  
And Jesus commended her faith and healed her daughter.  
Who does Jesus raise up?  
A syrophenician woman.  
A person from the very bottom of the pile.  
And that was not an isolated incident.  
He praised lepers when they showed gratitude,  
a tax collector when he showed repentance,

a prostitute when she showed generosity,  
and a Roman soldier when he showed faith.

Jesus caused the falling and rising of many in Israel?

Has he stopped?

No.

He's just expanded his operations.

Now he causes the falling and rising of many in the world.

Who are the great ones of our era?

You have Elon Musk the great visionary and innovator.

You have Bill Gates and Jeff Bezos  
great businessmen and philanthropists.

You have Cary Grant and Meryl Streep great actors.

Or Leonardo di Caprio and Jennifer Lawrence if you are younger.

You have Steve Smith and Serena Williams, sporting heroes.

You have the famous for being famous like Kim Kardashian.

Great scientists like Albert Einstein or Max Planck.

Are any of them great in God's eyes?

Well no, probably not.

Planck and Einstein did express vague belief in the existence of God.

But no personal relationship with the Lord Jesus.

The rest have no faith that you can find with google.

Meryl Streep when asked about her religious views  
says she believes in trying to make things better.

Sounds nice but it won't fly before the judgement seat of God.

None of these people are really great.

Who are the ones who are really great?

Tom Lin was accepted into Harvard University  
as one of the top 20 high school graduates  
in the United States of America.

He could have had a high flying career.

Instead he decided to ministry with the students  
in the American equivalent to a CU group.

His parents, Taiwanese Americans with great hopes  
for their family making it a success in their new country,

were gutted by his decision and didn't talk with him for years.  
They were so angry that he'd decided to do Christian ministry  
instead of pursuing a career,  
that they stopped going to church or mixing with their Christian friends.  
Tom was reconciled with his family when his mum got cancer.  
And after she died, Tom set off with his wife Nancy  
to pioneer a work amongst students in Mongolia.  
At that time, 2002, there were hardly any Christians in Mongolia.  
Tom and his wife had no Mongolian language,  
no financial assets behind them,  
and they had to relearn how to do Christian ministry  
in a completely different culture.  
There is now a Christian group for Mongolian Uni students.  
But it's nothing that would make the world acclaim Tom as great.  
But does God think he great?  
When Tom meets his Lord,  
I have no doubt he will hear the words,  
"Well done good and faithful servant."

Some people rise.  
Others fall.

The message of Christmas is that Jesus came to do that.  
And the way he does that is by exposing hearts.  
2:35 "So that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed."

Jesus reveals what people love in their hearts.

Jeff Bezos loves money and power.

Kim Kardashian loves fame.

Albert Einstein loved Physics.

He also loved playing around with women who weren't his wife.

Something he shares in common with Jeff Bezos and Bill Gates.

But Tom Lin loves God.

He loves the Lord Jesus.

He loves the good news of salvation.

Jesus reveals the thoughts of people's hearts.

And it's in that revelation that they are either rise or fall.

Jesus came for judgement.  
That was the first hidden meaning of Christmas.  
The second is Jesus came for conflict.  
He is "a sign that will be spoken against."  
There is no question that Simeon's prophecy was proved right.  
Jesus was called a 'friend of sinners'.  
That wasn't a compliment.  
It meant he was someone who gave encouragement  
to the people who were beyond the pale.  
He was called a glutton and a drunkard.  
Well if you don't participate in the fasts that are traditional,  
and you go turning water into wine,  
people who don't like you will call you some names.  
They also said that Jesus was demon possessed.  
It seems a strange charge  
to bring against someone who drove out demons.  
But it was Jesus' claims about himself that brought it on.  
He said things like "I and the Father are one".  
And they thought only someone possessed by a demon  
could utter such terrible blasphemies.  
Except that what he said was true.

The conflict that Jesus faced spills over into the lives of his followers.  
Jesus himself said that it would.  
Lk 12:51-53 "Do you think I came to bring peace on earth?  
No I tell you but division.  
From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other,  
three against two and two against three.  
They will be divided, father against son and son against father,  
mother against daughter and daughter against mother,  
mother in law against daughter in law,  
and daughter in law against mother in law."  
I already told the story of Tom Lim and his family.  
Following Jesus cost Tom  
the love of his mother and father for many years.  
We have people in our church

whose families have cut them off when they came to faith in Jesus.  
Jeremiah Paul spoke at our men's breakfast a couple of years back.  
His family will kill him if they catch him,  
because of his faith in Jesus.

But when Simeon says Jesus is a sign that will be spoken against,  
it can be broader than just in families.

In Australia right now,  
some people will call you intolerant or a bigot,  
when they know nothing more about you  
than that you have faith in Jesus.

Such is the antipathy towards Jesus.

They will ridicule you as believing in a sky fairy.

They will try to disbar you from practicing as a psychologist.

Jesus is a sign that is spoken against.

And those who follow him get carried along for the ride.

As Jesus said,

Jn 15:18 "If the world hates you,  
keep in mind that it hated me first."

So we have two Christmas messages.

Judgement and conflict.

The third is no more sweetness and light than the first two.

Suffering.

Simeon said to Mary,

2:35 "And a sword will pierce your own soul too."

Well Simeon's prophecy certainly came true in Mary's life.

Being the Mother of the Son of God was certainly no picnic.

There was the time when Jesus stayed back in the temple  
discussing religious questions with the scholars.

But Mary and Joseph had no idea where he was.

Anyone who's ever had a child get lost knows how that feels.

Then there was the time

when Mary thought that Jesus had lost his marbles.

She took Jesus' brothers to try to get him to come home.

Now Mary was of course completely wrong.

Jesus had not lost his marbles.

He was beginning his public ministry.  
He was teaching in public  
and arousing the wrath of the religious establishment.  
But he had not lost his mind.  
On the contrary, he was doing his Father's will.  
But you can feel for Mary, can't you?  
Imagine, your son whom you love  
is setting out on a path that will cause him a lot of grief.  
It might feel like a sword piercing your soul.  
Particularly when you call him away from his path,  
and his response when told  
his mother and brothers are outside waiting for him is,  
"Who is my mother and brothers?"  
That's going to make you feel loved and appreciated.  
And then finally you watch while they execute him.  
By then you have some more understanding  
of who he is and his mission.  
But it doesn't make it easy to watch your son in agony.  
With the cruel taunts of the passers by  
and the others crucified with him ringing in your ears.  
That would feel like a sword piercing your soul.

Again, suffering is not confined to Mary or to the disciples.  
Those who follow Jesus today are just as likely  
to experience the sword piercing their souls.  
Let me tell you  
of how a sword is guaranteed to pierce your soul if you follow Jesus.  
When you follow Jesus,  
other people's problems become your problem.  
Now don't get me wrong,  
following Jesus doesn't make you the saviour of the world like he is.  
But nevertheless, when someone has a problem,  
you will want to take some ownership.  
You will want to sit with them and see if you can lend a hand.  
And that means when they suffer,  
you suffer alongside of them.

A wealthy person was sharing with a friend,  
that a homeless person had slept on their doorstep the other night.

"Oh, what did you do?"

The friend asked her.

"We closed the curtains," was the reply.

I hope you are as shocked by that response as I am.

The Christian doesn't have the freedom to close the curtains.

We recognise everyone as made in the image of God.

And while we can't solve the problems of the world.

We will always want to do what we can.

And that means, more than closing the curtains.

And when you do more,

you will share in the griefs of those who are your fellow travellers.

You can't walk alongside of people

and remain oblivious to their troubles.

A sword will pierce your soul.

So there are the three hidden Christmas messages.

Judgement, conflict and suffering.

Now of course we hide those uncomfortable Christmas messages  
for the times

when we don't have a whole lot of Christmas visitors in the building.

Just because it's true

doesn't mean that any time is the right time to say it.

But for those who are committed to following Jesus,

these messages need to be heard.

If they caught us by surprise,

then we could be unsettled in our faith.

But when we are prepared,

we can encourage and strengthen each other.

As the writer to the Hebrews says,

"All the more as you see the day approaching."

Now I have no idea when Jesus will return.

If I claimed to, you should dismiss me as a crank.

Jesus himself said he had no idea when he would return.

But the writer to the Hebrews says you can see the day approaching.

I take it that is not because the day is near as the clock ticks.  
But because the character of the world  
shows the difficulties for God's people  
that give you confidence that he will not abandon us to our troubles.  
The day must be approaching.  
If you feel like that.  
Then the response is not to look at your watch.  
It's to see who you can encourage and strengthen.  
Who can you support  
in the face of the judgement, conflict and suffering  
that we see around us.

Let's pray for God's grace,  
that he would lead us in how to serve him,  
as the words of Simeon come true around us,  
even as we watch.