

My Eyes Have Seen Your Salvation

Luke 2:22-35

Introduction

This passage tells of things that happened after the birth of Jesus, yet it is appropriate in a season of Advent as we remember the anticipation of the coming of the Messiah. Here, Luke tells us of a saint who was waiting to see the promised Messiah and testified to his coming by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Summary of the Text

After His birth, Joseph and Mary take Jesus to the temple according to the law (vs. 22-24). There, they are met by a faithful man named Simeon who had been waiting for the Messiah. He had been led there by the Holy Spirit, who had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah (vs. 25-27). Simeon takes Jesus into his arms, blessing God and rejoicing in seeing God's salvation to the world in the Child (vs. 28-32). Joseph and Mary reverently contemplate Simeon's words, and he blesses them. He prophesies to Mary what Christ is destined for, the consequence of which would be that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed (vs. 33-35).

Substitutionary Salvation

Luke does not assume that the reader knows the law, and he makes clear that Jesus from the beginning fulfilled the requirements of the law. Christ was born into and brought under the law. Jesus was to come for us by taking on sinful flesh (Rom. 8:3-4) and subjecting Himself to the law (Gal. 4:4, 5:3). This was so that He could actually be the substitute for us when He took on Himself the sins of the world and the wrath of God. If He did not fully and actually become man, He could not represent us fully and actually. If He did not completely keep the requirements of the law, He could not impute to us the righteousness God requires of man. So, later, when Simeon says, "My eyes have seen Your salvation," this is what he sees. God sent His Son to take on flesh and to come under the law to free man from the curse of the law. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1).

Faith and Waiting

Who was this Simeon? We are told nothing in the text except that he was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation, and endowed with the Holy Spirit. Simeon was no doubt just and devout in his pious observance of the law, but Luke ties it also to his yearning for the Consolation of Israel—in other words his hope, trust, and faith in God's promises. These were promises that had been passed on among the faithful for centuries—promises given to Adam, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, Isaiah, and the other prophets. God had waited a long time, but in Simeon's day, the fullness of time had come (Gal. 4:4). But even then, and even now, there was and is still more waiting. God did not simply snap His fingers and fix everything then and there with the Incarnation. God seems to like the waiting game. Simeon and the remnant of faithful believers were waiting for the light to come. For us, Jesus has come. But there is still a waiting, a waiting for the fullness to be achieved (Rom. 8:18ff). We can learn, here, from Simeon. What was the manner in which he waited? He was just and devout, clinging to God's promises.

Peace and Courage

Simeon declares that his Master is releasing him in peace, just as He had said. Having seen the Christ, this saint was ready to face even death. In the infant Jesus, Simeon could see God's plan of salvation fulfilled, and this was enough for Simeon to face even death itself in cheerful peace. John Calvin writes, "how much more abundant materials of lasting peace are now furnished to us, who have the opportunity of beholding our salvation altogether completed in Christ?" The sight of Jesus (not the physical sight, but the sight of faith) is the source of peace and courage for the Christian. We run the path God has set before us looking to Him. We live in a world plagued by anxiety and fear, but Jesus promises peace and comfort (Ps. 94:19, Phil. 4:6-7), courage and strength (Ps. 27:1,14) to all those that look to Him (Is. 45:22). And just as Simeon had seen this light, so would all the nations.

Thoughts Revealed

Simeon also prophesies to Mary about what Jesus had come to do. Because of Him, the world would be turned upside down, and He would be resisted. It would not be as though the world would gladly welcome this salvation. It would even cost Mary herself dearly. The consequence of all of this would be the revelation of the thoughts of the hearts of many. Christ's coming and His reign and His gospel is salvation, but it brings division and strife with the unbelieving world. When the thoughts of men are revealed, it becomes evident whether they are being drawn to Jesus or driven away from Him. He is the light, and you either come to the light or shrink from it. There is no neutral stance.

Jesus was a sign to the world (and particularly to the Jews) through His death on the cross and resurrection and ascension. He was cursed for our sake, but He was raised from the dead, delivering us from the curse of the law and extending salvation apart from the law to the Gentiles (Gal. 3:10-14). He was the sign that salvation comes through Christ alone and not through the works of the law, not through any righteousness or goodness in man, not through any other savior. As the only Savior, He in His light and by His Word reveals the thoughts and desires of our hearts (cf. Heb. 4:12-13). Nothing is hidden from Him. When the light of the gospel shines, sins and idols are exposed. What will you do? Will you shrink from the light, turn back to the darkness, cover over your sins and hide your idols? Or will you cry out in repentance, turn to the Lord, seeking Him to cover your sins and confessing Jesus alone as Lord? The light is shining. Do you see?

Conclusion

In order to say, "let me depart in peace," we must be able to say, "my eyes have seen Your salvation." And if we can say that, then we have great courage and peace in facing whatever God has placed in front of us, even if it may be more waiting. What Jesus began to do in His coming, He continues to do—to shake, to unsettle, to reveal. But now, He does so as King, having already delivered His people from the curse of the law, having already obtained the salvation for all those who were far off that He will draw near. Salvation is in Christ alone by His grace alone. So fix your eyes on Him.