

Christmas-JosephMaryScandal 20-12-27a

We're at Grace and Truth Bible Church. This is the 27th day of December, 2020, and we're going to extend our look at the circumstances of the birth of Jesus Christ a little bit. It's, the longer I look at it, the more illuminating I find it in terms of the counterintuitive or unexpected nature of God's dealings with people who are at the very center of His plan, very center of His will, two of the most important people since Adam and Eve, and they have such a rough time.

You just can't believe it. The more you look at it, the worse it gets. And I think if knowing what we know now, if there was a large group of people and God the Father said, all right, I need two of you to be the parents of the Messiah, let me see a show of hands, anyone who would like to volunteer.

I don't think anybody, including Joseph and Mary, would just rush to raise their hand. And it's very encouraging to me that just because we face challenges doesn't necessarily mean we need to revisit how close we are to being in the plan and purpose of God and that we're doing what we're supposed to do. Sometimes challenge is just a part of it.

So we looked at the first half of that last Sunday, and we're going to look at the second part of it this Sunday. So let's take a moment to ask God's blessing on our fellowship and on our study and on our enjoyment of our musical contributions, and then we'll begin. Father, it is a blessing to find in the circumstances of the world, the overt opportunity to direct our attention to your son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and to reflect on the many facets of his ministry from its beginning to its conclusion on this earth.

We thank you that he even now sits at your right hand, victorious over sin and over death, representing us, mediating on our behalf, interceding for us, and representing the regeneration and the justification, the atonement that enables us in him to receive all of the wonderful blessings, opportunities, and future potentials that are grouped under that term, eternal life. We thank you for him. We thank you for your grace in sending him on our behalf.

The larger facets of your plan that include the redemption of the people Israel and their future kingdom and your coming kingdom. We pray that as we look at these truths from your word, that God, the Holy Spirit will impress them on our hearts and help us to be thoroughly equipped for every good work, to present ourselves living sacrifices, and to be ever more prepared for that day when the Lord Jesus comes back to take us to himself and present us before your throne. We pray these things in Jesus' name, amen.

The birth of Jesus Christ was one of the most unanticipated, anticipated events in history. The people of Israel in particular had been looking for their Messiah. There were people we know from the gospel accounts when they're talking about Simeon and Anna that we visited last time, the account of their recognition of the child at his dedication.

There were many who had been anticipating the hope of Israel. Simeon personally had the Holy

Spirit and was assured by him that he would not see death before he had laid eyes on God's salvation. And the interesting thing about Simeon is that you want to ask, or you want to know in Luke chapter two, how did he know this? Why Simeon of all the old guys in Israel of whom there were many, why Simeon? And so if you turn in your Bibles to Luke chapter two and a couple of dozen verses into the chapter, I want to revisit the description of Simeon right quick, because we look at our situation today.

We've got a lot of circumstances in social and political and cultural and medical arenas. And we're curious what is about to happen in the plan and purpose of God. So I asked myself, how did Simeon know? Well, beginning in verse 25, it says, this is Luke chapter two, verse 25.

Behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. This is, there's a group of similar names or probably the same name. This is basically the same name as Simon.

Simeon, Shimon, Simeon are the same. It's not an infrequently found name. You know that one of the three leader disciples was Simeon that Jesus renamed to Peter.

But Simon Peter had this name. One of the brothers of Jesus has this name. He's got four brothers named in scripture and one of them is Shimon.

So he has this name and it says that he was just and devout. There is a lot of talk today and there's a resurgence of reformed theology and Calvinism and the emphasis on God's sovereignty. I am in the forefront of the pack.

I am at the tip of the spear. I am as gung-ho as anybody on the sovereignty of God. I will affirm the sovereignty of God as far as you want to take it until you push it past what God uses it for.

God is sovereign enough to dictate everybody's life, every circumstance, every movement that we make if he chooses. But I go further than a Calvinist. I go further than a reformed theologian in affirming the sovereignty of God.

I don't think they go far enough. They believe that God is so sovereign that he determines human choices, particularly those related to salvation and that no one chooses salvation, no one chooses Christ without a sovereign act of God's will to make it happen. That's lame.

It belittles God, it diminishes God and in their effort to lift God up and to emphasize his sovereignty, they do the opposite in my view. It doesn't go far enough. I made this comment to somebody and I may have mentioned it last week, but it's a great summary of the sovereignty of God.

It's one kind of a God. It's one power of God to be able to create a very complex history of man with all of its causes, conditions, successions and relations and to program like we would. Let's say we've got an unmanned space flight.

We program everything. We, I say we, guys that do this kind of thing, engineer the craft,

engineer the propulsion, the engines, fill it full of computers and equipment and design a sequence of events very carefully, program it in so that it's going to launch. It's going to have first stage and second stage separation of the rocket boosters.

It's going to get into orbit. It's going to adjust. It's going to go to Mars.

It's going to get to Mars and it's going to do an automated landing sequence where it's going to turn around and it's going to resist the very faint Martian atmosphere. It's going to land and it's going to do tests. It's going to radio these things back.

We've done this. We've programmed all of this and we are completely sovereign over every piece, part and program that runs in that entire mission. And there are many who think, in fact, there are a growing number and you will run into them sooner or later who believe that this is the way God does history.

He figured it all out before the foundation of the world. He programmed it and it is running flawlessly. Every decision you make, the fact that you are a believer is something that God ordained and programmed.

So he determined the function of your will to believe. That's what they believe. This is an incredibly sovereign God who can do that in the same way that we are sovereign over machines and computers.

However, that's a human point of view and that's a human grasp of how God could have done history. And of course he can make provisions and he can interweave things because he knows what's going to happen because he programmed the whole thing. It's not sovereign enough.

It's not powerful enough. That's a limited God and it's not the God of Scripture. The God of Scripture is so sovereign that he has created free agents, free agent angels and free agent humans.

And despite the fact that these seemingly random and unpredictable choosers are given in the image of God sovereignty over their own choices, now people say, well, but it's not really free will. I can't choose to flap my arms and fly. I can't choose to pick up my house and see what's underneath it.

I can't choose to do this and that and the other. I'm constrained by circumstances. This is a specious argument.

We're talking about within an available and doable set of options, which one do I choose? Am I free or does God ordain? Did God ordain my tie this morning? Did God ordain how much coffee you drank or which Bible you brought? If there are free agents and if they are truly free and God does not predetermine their choices and yet he is able to weave those free choices into his plan and work all things together for good, this is a greater God. And my question is, if God is as great as it gets, and I'm talking to a Calvinist or a reformed theology believing person, how is

it that my God can be greater than yours? How can there be a greater God than God? But I think anybody with an objective mind will admit that it would be a greater God that could basically herd cats. People can't do that.

We have to train animals with that. We have to get leashes and harnesses and we can control animals with bridles and bits and stalls and gates and electric fences. And we can, within a limited environment, let animals do what they wanna do.

You can leave your dog in the house to either rest quietly or get into mischief. They've got free will, but we manage them. How is it that God can't manage the human race unless he determines every choice? If you think that there is a God who despite untold millions of free wills and can still work all things together for good, that is a greater God.

So I tell Calvinists and reformed theologians, sorry, not only is your God not the God of the Bible, he's not great enough. He's not as great as the God who saved me and who despite your misunderstanding saved you and that you freely chose to accept. You cannot have accountability without responsibility.

And if we're not responsible for our choice, we cannot be held accountable for it. I don't care how many kinds of twisty turny things you do. So it's very important when you look at Simeon, what does it say about Simeon? Why does God give the Holy Spirit in the age when people didn't get the Holy Spirit as a rule? Simeon gets the Holy Spirit.

Look at what it says in verse 25. He's just and devout waiting for the consolation of Israel and the Holy Spirit was upon him. This tells you something amazing about Simeon.

He was such a diligent, faithful Old Testament saint. God gave him the Holy Spirit. Jesus will say 30 odd years from this point, if you being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him? Simeon had the boldness to ask and he could ask and be that bold because he qualified.

He qualified himself. He was just and devout. He was devout.

He dedicated himself. He cared enough. He was qualified and he made the request.

He said, Father in heaven, I want to know more. I want to see more. I want to appreciate your glory even more.

And God said, you've got it. Here's my spirit. Not only that, you're praying to God the Father.

You are given the Holy Spirit and you are going to see God the Son. This is the promise that we have open to any one of us that if we have his words and keep them, I'm in John chapter 14, chapter 15. The one who has my words and keeps them, he is the one who loves me.

I and my Father will come to him and make our home with him. The Father and the Son, and we know we have the Holy Spirit, the entire presence of God in our souls for the asking, for the

taking, for the receiving. If it's important to us and if we don't get too much in this world, too much caught up in circumstances, this is what Simeon achieved.

It was a wild time in the days when Jesus was born. There was a lot going on in the Roman government. There were censuses taking place.

There were shifts in power. There was the death of Herod in 4 BC that has not happened at this point, but is going to, but he is executing his sons. He's unpredictable.

There is all kinds of turmoil. Simeon was a man who dedicated himself to the things of God. He didn't dedicate himself to studying Roman history or Roman government or the political interactions that went on with these various assignments and the Herods and what they were doing.

Dedicated himself to God and the Holy Spirit was upon him. We gloss over this. This was a rare thing.

Who got the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament age? Kings and prophets and Simeon. Tabernacle workmen, kings, prophets and Simeon because he loved God. And he was looking for the consolation, waiting for the consolation of Israel.

And it's proper to capitalize that in your King James or your new King James, the consolation of Israel. This is the coming of the Messiah, consolation of Israel. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit.

This is what the Holy Spirit does. A lot of people in a lot of different types of denominations holiness, Pentecostal place a great emphasis on having the Holy Spirit, knowing that you've got the Holy Spirit. Here's a sign you've got him because this is the way you act or this is what you're able to do.

But this is the purpose of having the Holy Spirit. We have the Holy Spirit. What is his purpose? It was revealed to him by the Spirit.

If you wanna know the truth of God, if you wanna know the right thing to do, the best course of action, where to spend time, how to be a good steward of resources, the Holy Spirit will reveal it to us through the word. Now he always reveals through the word. Jesus said the Holy Spirit when he comes with his new church age ministry, isn't gonna speak from himself.

He's gonna take from the things of Christ and he is going to communicate them. Holy Spirit doesn't talk on his own BS. So how does the Holy Spirit reveal to Simeon that he's gonna see the Messiah? Now there is direct revelation.

The authors of scripture, many cases had direct revelation, direct inspiration from God. And the fact that he's going to live long enough to see this is an affirmation directly from the Holy Spirit. But I strongly suspect that Simeon got this from his Bible in the same way that the wise men

are going to get their directions from the word of God when they see the star in the East or having seen it at this point.

So it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. He was a just a devout man waiting for it. And God said, you're not gonna die until you see it.

And one of the interesting things when you think about the sovereignty of God and his foreknowledge is to know that there would be a man with such a heart as Simeon. What if Simeon had been born in, you know, 159 BC and he would have to live over 150 years before he could see the Lord's Christ. And he's got such a heart for it.

And it would be such a blessing for him to lay eyes on the constellation of Israel, but he's been born too early. God decided when and where Simeon would be born. Think about that.

And that he would be an old, old man and have to wait. God decided the exact time and place when Simeon would be born. God decided that one of the rewards for him would be to see this as an old man.

There is a theme that starts all the way back with Abraham on God doing the unexpected with very old people. Sarah was very old. Abraham was very old.

There's an interesting observation somebody made that we'll explore on that front before long. But Zachariah was very old. Elizabeth was very old.

Simeon is very old. Anna in the next section here is very old. Anybody who gets very old can reflect on these wonderful examples in scripture.

And remember that God does this on purpose. God leaves you here until you're very old so that he can demonstrate his power at that point. And that's what he does for Simeon.

So it had been revealed to him. Verse 27, he came by the spirit. How many times has the Holy Spirit been mentioned now? Holy Spirit was upon him in verse 25.

Holy Spirit had revealed to him in verse 26 and he was led by the Spirit to the temple. He has the presence, he has the revelation, and he has the guidance. This is the great inheritance that we all have through Christ in this age, is to have the presence of the Spirit, to have the revelation of the Spirit, and to have the leading and guiding of the Spirit.

And here's a man who foreshadows that before this age ever comes, enjoys it before it gets here. Why? Because he is a just and devout man. He's focused on what's important.

He loves God beyond anything. And God loves him back. So when the parents brought the child Jesus to do for him according to the custom of the law, Simeon took the child up in his arms and blessed God.

Blessed God, why? That's been his focus his whole life. He's just and devout. And even as he holds the child Jesus, who is he blessing? What's the first blessing that comes to his mind as he holds the child? God in heaven.

He's holding the baby Jesus. Not very many people got to do that. Child's a week old.

He's got him in his arms, but he's blessing God. And you can see his blessing here in the next four verses. Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace according to your word.

For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of your people, Israel. If you want to know how much Simeon knew, look at the order in verse 32. Gentiles first and then Israel.

You remember when God revealed to Rebecca that before the children had even been born that the elder would serve the younger, Jacob and Esau struggling in her womb, two nations are there. Here's the child, a week old, and Simeon already knows that the great revelation is going to come to the Gentiles before the glory comes to Israel. The glory won't come to Israel until the millennial kingdom, but Simeon sees it.

And Joseph and his mother, meaning the child's mother, marveled at the things which were spoken of him. This sentence makes a lot more sense in Greek than it does the way they have it translated here. But at the things which were spoken of him, Joseph and his mother marveled.

Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother, behold, this, you notice child is not there. Let me just make a quick aside here. You remember Ephesians 2, 8 and 9. For by grace, you have been saved through faith and that not of yourselves.

It is a gift of God, not of works. So many people in the Calvinist reform persuasion think that faith is the it that was a gift of God, not of works because faith and works are contrasted in Paul and in James. And so they'll go to Ephesians 2, 8, 9 and say, by grace you have been saved through faith and that faith is not of yourselves.

That faith is the gift of God. But you really have to look at that demonstrative pronoun because grace and faith and so on are feminine gender nouns and the demonstrative is neuter. That not of yourselves, it is the gift and that's neuter because it comprises the entire thing.

And why do I bring that up at this point? Because when Simeon blesses them and says to Mary in verse 34, behold, this, child is not there. He's not talking about just the child. He's talking about everything that he just said.

Your salvation, which you have prepared before the face of all people alike to bring revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of your people. This whole thing is destined for the falling and rising of many in Israel and for a sign which will be spoken against. This, not the least part of which is that it's coming to the Gentiles first.

This is going to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel because many in Israel are not going to be able to accept that God is extending his plan to include Gentiles and is going to actually incorporate them into the gift that he is going to make of a portion of the believing human race to his son. We as church age believers are a gift from the father. That's why Jesus says all that the father has given to me will come to me and the one who comes to me I will in no wise cast out.

God has not given old Testament Israel to Jesus. God gave his body to him as the head. So this, which is everything in verses 29 through 32 is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel and for a sign which will be spoken against.

He's not just talking about the child, the sign that when he comes to his own and his own receive him not, but as many as receive him are going to have the authority are going to have the power to be called sons of God. And that this is going to be inclusive and the entire program is going to turn to the Gentiles is a sign and that sign will be spoken against. So even on dedication day, along with the blessing, along with the fulfillment of God's gracious promises to Shimeon, there is this element of the promise of trouble, there is the element of division and controversy that is spoken of.

Even as God accomplishes salvation for Gentiles and for Israel, there is speaking against, there is falling and rising, which implies separation. If some things fall and some things rise, they're not together at the point where they started anymore. And it gets explicit in verse 35.

Indeed, a sword will pierce through your own soul also that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed. The word of God is alive and powerful, sharper than a two edged sword piercing to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit and is a judge, an expositor, an evaluator of the thoughts and intents of the heart. The thoughts of many hearts will be revealed in this entire thing.

All of this comes with this brief encounter. It's very short, but it is the fulfillment and the high point of Shimeon's entire life. His entire life boils down to this moment.

And he delivers inspired prophetic words that have resonated in the pages of scripture for 2000 years. Because he was just, because he was devout, because he loved God. God determined when and where he would be born.

God brought him to this place. God appointed him to be at the temple on that day. And as my closing thought for this first session, if you turn over to Luke's second book, Acts chapter 13, there is a corresponding episode, if you will.

Actually, I'm going to save that for right after the break because I want to talk about it a little bit and we're close to time for break. And I've been reminded in the past that I shouldn't start something I can't finish when we have to take a break. So we're going to come back to Acts right after we pause and we're going to look at something similar.

And it has to do with God appointing people to be in the right place at the right time for

something that is central to his plan and purpose. That's what happened with Simeon. Why was he in the right place at the right time? Because he had made choices in his life.

He chose to be just. He chose to be devout. Devout in English is a cousin of the word devoted.

You're devout because you're devoted. And that's a pattern of priority. It's a pattern of treating something as central and making it a part of your values and your goals.

To prioritize the things of God puts us in a position, creates a potential where God can use us in extraordinary and often unexpected ways. I doubt that Simeon realized that what he said on that dedication day to Joseph and Mary was going to be set down at the same level as the Old Testament scriptures that he loved so much and poured over by countless generations of believers from that time to this. He didn't know he's going to find out when he's raised, but he was a faithful man and God used him in this very pivotal central moment in history to deliver divine truth in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

And we're going to see another example of God positioning human beings to be at the right place at the right time for something special to happen right after we come back from the break.