

## CHRISTMAS GLORY FOR THOSE WHO HAVE EYES TO SEE IT - Part 1

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### WHY PEOPLE LOVE CHRISTMAS GLORY AT A DISTANCE BUT NOT CLOSE UP

**Luke 2:21-35** - "And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb. [22] And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord [23] (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord") [24] and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons." [25] Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. [26] 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. [27] And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, [28] he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, [29] "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; [30] for my eyes have seen your salvation [31] that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, [32] a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel." [33] And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. [34] And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed [35] (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."

For the truly converted, there comes to the surface at Christmas one of the strangest happenings among mankind. It's not something everyone senses - but the Godly see it and are amazed. People **love God when he's left undefined and vague** - far enough out of the way so as not to be a threat - like the **baby Jesus in the manger**.

The masses have a love/hate relationship with the meaning of Christmas. People all over the world sing, "**Silent night, holy night - all is calm, all is bright - round von virgin, mother and child.... "Wait a minute! Virgins don't conceive and give birth. What going on here?"**

That kind of deep working through the logic would bring God too close to home. There would be life-altering implications. That's what I mean when I say people **resist God close up - living, sovereign, reigning, defined, and challenging the morality of their cultural tastes**.

This resistance to Jesus as Savior and Lord keeps bubbling up to the surface in the same repeated ways:

- \* Persisting through the centuries is the view that there are many ways to God - all religions leading to the same place. **But are there no false religions? Are there no such things as religious errors?** If there are no errors, then Christianity must logically be true. **And dead at the center of the Christian faith is the conviction that Jesus Christ is the only way to God.**
- \* How do you explain those thronging masses who admire Jesus and say He was a great moral teacher - perhaps the greatest spiritual teacher ever - **yet refuse to accept what He taught about Himself and why He came into this world?**
- \* How can people hold such high regard and respect for Christ's **virtuous life and yet reject His words?** How can people so thoughtlessly separate what Jesus **did** from what He **said** about Himself - who He **was**, why He **came**, how one receives **eternal life**, the reality of **future reward or damnation**.

Surely, you can't just look at a person's generosity and kindness and sacrifice, without also looking at his central message and mind set.

Though perhaps overly quoted, **C.S. Lewis** was surely right when he said - "**Either this was truly the Son of God, or else a madman or something much worse.**"

So here we are. What we see in all of this is perhaps not a bold **denial** as a selective tip-toeing around the revelation of Christmas. True, baby Jesus get a sentimental hug by many. People like **some** of the things He said. And they like **some** of the things he did. But they have a very hard time embracing **the heart of who Jesus is** and the **heart of what He said**.

The Bible actually speaks to this mixture of admiration and rejection when it comes to God's self-disclosure in Christ Jesus - ***why people resist God when He closes in and makes Himself fully understood:***

**John 3:19 - "And *this is the judgment*: the light has come into the world, and *people loved the darkness rather than the light* because their *works were evil*."**

Those words come from the lips of Jesus, Himself. Notice that little word "***judgment***." Some translations use the word "***verdict***." It means, the ***final conclusion*** - the ***bottom line*** - the ***end of the story*** - after all the arguments and evidence have been heard and assessed. That's what ***verdict*** means. The verdict is the ***unescapable, factual result of a search for truth***. Verdicts aren't based on whim, or feelings, or emotion. Verdicts are reached when all personal bias is swept aside.

And the verdict - the ***final judgment*** - is this: ***mankind, on the whole rejects Jesus - not necessarily Christmas - because the real truth about Jesus always challenges our sin and our need for divine grace***. So says the baby born in the manger.

True Christianity is fundamentally about human ***sin before it's about divine love and grace and hope***. Talk about God and people are patient to listen. Talk about religion and you will still manage an audience. Talk about "near death experiences" and you can sell books. Talk about love and the universal brotherhood of mankind and people will give you awards. ***Tell this world what Jesus himself said about why He came and the crowds start to thin. Many will be offended by your words.***

All of this is right at the core of our opening text in Luke's gospel. As amazing as it seems to us, this old man, ***Simeon***, prophetically anticipates this rejection of Jesus and gives the reason.

1) **WE SHOULD LISTEN TO SIMEON BECAUSE LUKE TELLS US THE HOLY SPIRIT WAS SPEAKING THROUGH HIM**

**Luke 2:25-26** - "Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and ***the Holy Spirit was upon him***. [26] ***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."

Luke assures us Simeon spoke words rooted in revelation deeper than the mere wisdom of his accumulated years. He's also described warmly as being ***righteous, devout, and longing to see God's Messiah***.

But his years of experience ***had*** taught him something important. He has been around long enough to see how totally corrupt religious observances could become. He had lived long enough to see how futile best intentions were to inwardly transform hearts. ***He was longing for something more. He was waiting for the fulfillment of divine promise.***

That last point is very important. ***Simeon knew he couldn't put his trust in man's natural integrity and devotion to be right with God***. That's the reason he's been literally dying to see the Messiah. ***God honors Simeon because God loves to be relied on - to be taken at His word - to glorify Himself on behalf of desperately trusting people.***

2) **SIMEON IS ONE OF THE FEW WHO SEEMS TO HAVE GRASPED THE KIND OF MISSION THE MESSIAH WOULD ESTABLISH**

**Luke 2:30-32, 35** - "....for my eyes have seen your salvation [31] that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, [32] a light for revelation ***to the Gentiles***, and for ***glory to your people Israel***....[35].... (and ***a sword will pierce through your own soul*** also), so that ***thoughts from many hearts may be revealed***."

We know Simeon grasped at least two central truths:

- a) ***Messiah's salvation was a global salvation***. God was reaching out to ***everyone*** - both ***Jews and Gentiles***. God was going to accomplish a salvation for all who would receive it. This was no small parochial rescue mission. There were no boundaries of class or ethnicity. No one was ***left out***.
- b) ***This salvation was to be accomplished by the Messiah's suffering and death***. Watch and see how this kind old prophet ***tries to prepare and fortify Mary's heart*** - "***....and a sword will pierce through your own soul also....***" (35).

This tells us something important. This old man is just starting to unpack the answer to our teaching title. God is viewed differently when He closes in on a sinful world - even when He closes in lovingly and redemptively. Not

everyone would feel the excitement Mary probably experienced when she felt the impact of the angel's words about this supernatural baby she was carrying. Now she sees another truth is coming into focus. Many who admire God when they look up into the stars will hate and reject God Incarnate.

***Simeon says she would be pierced through - sliced open - over the pain of Messiah's rejection one day down the road.*** That pain, of course, would be the horrible pain of seeing the world reject and crucify her Son.

We just don't know where Simeon had learned all of this. Luke tells us the Holy Spirit was involved in revealing this truth. And certainly God had made the information available. Perhaps Simeon had poured over the words of Isaiah - "***He was bruised for our iniquities.***" - or studied the prophecies of Ezekiel - "***They shall look on me, whom they have pierced.***" But we know Simeon saw - he grasped in some way - what God was going to be doing in Jesus Christ.

3) **MORE THAN ANYTHING, SIMEON SAW HUMAN PRIDE WOULD MAKE IT HARD FOR MOST PEOPLE TO EXPERIENCE DIVINE FORGIVENESS AND GRACE IN JESUS CHRIST**

**Luke 2:34-35** - "And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed [35] (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."

With the coming of Jesus there would begin an ***unveiling*** - a ***revealing*** - of our deepest thoughts, loves, and ambitions. We treasure things not worth treasuring and marginalize the things most worth treasuring - "***....so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed***" (35). Simeon says the insides of people's hearts would be exposed. ***Jesus would bring to the surface something very dangerous in mankind.***

***Simeon***, speaking prophetically over a little baby. His words are about a distant future. Were Simeon's words true? How did this "***rising and falling of many***" - this "***sign that is opposed***" - this great ***revealing*** of the "***thoughts from many hearts***" come about? More to the point, ***did*** all of these things come about?

And for that we need to look at the words of Jesus, not as a little baby in the arms of Simeon, but as a man about to die for the sins of the world:

**John 9:39-41** - "Jesus said, '**For judgment I came into this world**, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.' [40] Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, 'Are we also blind?' [41] Jesus said to them, 'If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt ***remains.***"

If we're alert this morning we should all find something either ***disturbing***, or at least a bit ***confusing*** in Jesus' first sentence in this text - "***....For judgment I came into this world....***" Does that sentence bother you? Doesn't your mind immediately go back to those beautiful, comforting words in John 3:17 - "***For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.***"

Some translations even say, "***For God did not send his Son into the world to judge the world....***" So what is going on with Jesus' words in John 9:39 - "Jesus said, "**For judgment I came** into this world...."?

And now we're right on the powerful edge of old Simeon's words in Luke 2:34-35 - "And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, 'Behold, this child is appointed for ***the fall and rising of many in Israel***, and for ***a sign that is opposed*** [35] (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that ***thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.***"

Hear these words big enough. This is Simeon prophesying that the most important thing about every human being on the planet is going to be ***revealed - brought to the surface*** - in exposure to Jesus Christ. Or to say it differently, it is upon exposure to the truth of Jesus Christ - God the Son - and the purpose of His coming at Christmas and dying Good Friday and rising Easter Sunday - ***it is in response to those facts that the most important thing about every human being is brought into the light.***

***And in John chapter nine the adult Messiah says exactly the same thing - John 9:39-41 - "....For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.'*** [40] Some of the Pharisees near him

heard these things, and said to him, 'Are we also blind?' [41] Jesus said to them, 'If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains.'"

So in closing we need to confront our earlier question. *John 3:17* says God did *not* send His Son into the world to judge the world. In *John 9:39* the Son Himself says, "*For judgment I came into this world....*" So which is it?

*John 3:17* means God never had any intention of coming to sinful, fallen, needy people to *rub their nose in their own sin and tell them they were going to get what was coming to them*. His coming into this world was a gracious *rescue coming*. Jesus said He came to sinners exactly the same way a *doctor comes to the sick*. This is the good news we call the *gospel*.

*John 9:39* describes an *inevitable process*. Jesus effects this judgment by His *presence*, not by His *pronouncement*. And then Jesus clarifies. He effects change in *two directions*.

*First, people who didn't see start to see*. They see they can't remake their own hearts. They see they aren't oriented toward eternity. They see Jesus died for their sins. Perhaps most importantly, they just start to see their presumed goodness is their own form of pride to hide their own sin. They start to *see* this as they consider Christ.

*Second, people who thought they could see just fine become increasingly blind to their own darkness and hopelessness*. There are people like that in this room. There have always been people who shut out the light of gospel truth by pretending to themselves they are seeing everything just fine. They *pretend to themselves* they have no urgent, immediate need to participate in the great saving work of Christ.

This is the worst form of judgment. Jesus told these self-approving people their "*guilt remained*" (41). Take note of that word - "*remains.*" This is not where their guilt *occurred*. This is the place where, instead of being *pardoned* it "*remained.*"

*Jesus' words carry their own power and energy. People become blind to their true spiritual condition and eternal need. You don't have to feel you're a sinner to be a sinner*. These words mean you have a deep need for Jesus that in its most desperate form manifests itself in the way you no longer even *feel* your need for Jesus. This is the blindness that comes from simply mentally passing on Christ as your Redeemer.

*Is that you as you stare Jesus - God incarnate - in the face this Christmas? Your guilt remains even if you no longer have eyes to see it. You become locked into your sinful self even when you no longer feel it*. Don't let your *sin* or your *blindness* remain. Receive the truth of Jesus the Redeemer deeply in your mind and your heart. And do it right away.