

The Comfort and Salvation of Jesus

December 23, 2018

Have you ever felt times where you've listened to a sermon and you feel so oppressed because you felt as though all the weight of responsibility was on you to change? I'm not talking about a sermon where you walk away feeling convicted of sin and you are called to repent. I'm talking about a sermon that simply says, "You need to love people! That's what God wants you to do. Therefore, you better love." Then you feel like a gargantuan failure because you know you don't love like you're supposed to, but the Bible says that you know if you're a Christian if you love one another. And, then you see that the fruit of the Spirit includes love. So, you merely are left with this sense that you are a sinner. But, you were never pointed to grace.

I know this has been my tendency before, and I know of many other people who will confess that they oftentimes feel the weight of having to perform for God's approval. While at the same time, some people listen to those sermons and they don't even realize that their application for their life is simply to "perform" for God. They say, "Good idea! I'll do this." They have their rules. They try hard. They accomplish their tasks. They feel good. But both of these responses are wrong. And let me try to explain why.

There's a story that goes this way: a girl by the name of Robin found herself in a very difficult English literature course that she desperately wanted to get out of. She sat there on her first day and thought, "If I don't transfer out of this class, I'm going to fail. The other people in this class are much smarter than me. I can't do this." She came home with tears in her eyes and begged her dad to help her get out of the class so she could take a regular English course. Steve said, "Of course." So the next day he took her down to the school and they went to the head of the English department. . . . Steve remembers the event in these words:

She (the head of the English department) looked up and saw me standing there by my daughter and could tell that Robin was about to cry. There were some students standing around and, because the teacher didn't want Robin to be embarrassed, she dismissed the students saying, "I want to talk to these people alone." As soon as the students left and the door was closed, Robin began to cry. I said, "I'm here to get my daughter out of that English class. It's too difficult for her. The problem with my daughter is that she's too conscientious. So, can you put her into a regular English class?" The teacher said, "Mr. Brown, I understand." Then she looked at Robin and said, "Can I talk to Robin for a minute?" I said, "Sure." She said, "Robin, I know how you feel. What if I promised you an A no matter what you did in the class? If I gave you an A before you even started, would you be willing to take the class?" My daughter is not dumb! She started sniffing and said, "Well, I think I could do that." The teacher said, "I'm going to give you an A in the class. You already have an A, so you can go to class."

You know what happened to that girl? Some of you may say, “She winged it. She did her worse and she failed, but she got an ‘A’ anyway.” In actuality, she legitimately got an A. Because, for her, the threat of a bad grade was removed. Now, she felt free. In some similar ways, that is how God operates with us. But I may be getting ahead of myself.

And you could be wondering, “what does this all have to do with the sermon today?” I want you to imagine the time period in which Jesus was born. I want you to imagine the Old Testament sacrificial system in Jerusalem where myriads of gallons of blood was shed a year in order to signify to the Jewish people their need for forgiveness from God. While the Old Testament said, “Do this and you will live,” the death’s in the sacrificial system continually showed the people they didn’t do what God commanded. What must it have been like to only see that they were imperfect day-in and day-out?

Well, people then were similar to people today. Some felt crushed, waiting for God’s rescue. Others felt that they were doing just fine making applications – doing “good enough.” Yet, Israel was still going through turmoil and every admitted that there was a Messiah to come. It had been 400 years since God spoke to them through a prophet. Add to the mixture to all of this that the Jewish people lived during a time period where the Roman government took control over Israel. You have Herods and tax collectors. The Jewish people are being taken advantage of monetarily. They’re also being taken advantage of with regards to their own civil rights.

It is in the midst of this type of turbulence that Jesus enters the world. Wouldn’t you know it that the ones who thought they were relatively fine, were looking for a Messiah to pat them on the back and then destroy the enemies. But those who knew their sin, were looking for a Savior. One of those individuals who saw the Messiah’s goal more clearly was Simeon. And, today we are going to study Luke 2:22-35. In this short story, we get to know a man that is mentioned nowhere else in Scripture and nowhere else outside of Scripture. Yet, in this story, we see that **the goal of the Messiah is to bring salvation and comfort to the world.**

With this understanding, let’s read Luke 2:22-35.

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.” ¹

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Lk 2:22–35.

The story takes place with Mary and Joseph going to the temple to fulfill their ceremonial obligations to the Lord. We see the name “Lord” used six times in these verses, and that is very interesting to me. The reason that’s interesting to me. In verse 11 of this chapter we hear that Jesus is “Christ the Lord,” and then in verse 22, we find that Jesus is going to be presented to the Lord, and that He is the Lord’s Christ (as stated in verse 26). Let’s not miss the splendor of this story. Jesus is One with the Lord and *is* the Lord! Again we see the truth of Emmanuel, God with us! God the Son came to earth as a baby to save people. But how was he going to save them?

1. Jesus had to fulfill all the law (vv. 22-24)

Now we find ourselves moving forward in this story, and verse 21 tells us that Mary and Joseph obeyed the angel by naming the baby Jesus. Then, we find that the parents continue to obey the Lord. It was the time of purification according to the Law of Moses. And, they also were going to present Jesus to the Lord because every firstborn Jewish male child was called to be set apart (or holy) for the Lord.

Luke brings a couple of things together in this story. First, it was the time of **purification** for Mary. According to Leviticus 12, there were customs that related to the birth of babies. If a woman had a baby, she was unclean for a certain number of days. The reason for her uncleanness was because of the blood that was spilled from her body. Uncleanness does not mean that she was necessarily sinning, but I think (at least at a basic level) it was a sign and picture that a human being was living in a cursed world because blood is lost. As a result of the knowledge of living in a cursed world, God had this call for women (after birth) to seek for purification after a set time period. She would go to the priest and then offer an animal to be sacrificed so that she would not experience death.

Now, this is a symbol of a greater reality. God says even in the Old Testament that He does not desire sacrifices, but He desires a broken and a contrite heart. The symbols, sacrifices and offerings were to be an outward manifestation of an inward change.

But, what’s really amazing to me about the purification sacrifice that is taking place here is the fact that it symbolizes atonement. Leviticus 12:7 says, “and he shall offer it before the Lord and make atonement for her.”² That feels ironic to me. Mary is holding the Christ. She is holding Jesus, and she is going to the temple for purification and atonement and cleansing!

For clarification, let me simply explain the word “atone.” Think of it by simply dividing up the first type syllables of the word: “at one.” It signifies a unifying of one thing to another. It gives the idea of being reconciled with someone whom you were at odds with. Mary is going into the temple because she hasn’t been able to worship in the temple for a while because of the visual reminder of her blood – signifying that she is a sinner who is decaying in this world. Therefore, she is going to the temple to express her continual need for a right relationship with God and even a right relationship with the people of God.

Being under the old covenant Law, Mary does this. But think about who she’s holding! Jesus’ name means “Yahweh saves.” Yahweh is the covenant-keeping name of God. It means that God always keeps His promises, and God has made a promise to save people. Throughout the entire Old Testament, God has been making this promise. Then we read the entire Old Testament and find that all the sacrifices are pointing to the fact that we are sinners and we need someone to put an end to all of these sacrifices! So, here in this temple, in the arms of Mary, is the Christ who is going to put an end to the seemingly endless sacrifices. The picture of atonement that Mary will receive in that temple is pointing to the clear atonement that is found in Jesus – an atonement that is made once, for all who believe. 1 Peter 3:18

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Le 12:7.

says it plainly: ¹⁸ **For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God,** ³

What a beautiful reality that I think we can all relate to as well. How many of you have lived under the weight of feeling “not right” with God? Maybe you would pray every day saying, “I’ll never sin that sin again” or “I will try harder. I promise.” Or, maybe you even got to a point where you simply said, “Forget it, I’m good enough.” But, deep down inside, all of us know the weight of being a sinner. We all know that we’re going to die someday. We all know that we are weak and there are evidences of our sin all around us. We can’t simply put band-aids on our failures and say, “I’ll try better next time.” There is a Holy, Righteous, Perfect, Glorious, Wonderful, Gracious God who is the Judge and He is also the Savior. Maybe you have been closing your eyes to your own sin because you don’t want to admit how sinful you really are, but please listen. God wants you to see your sin so that You can see His grace.

Where are you? Are you the type of person who knows your weakness and finds comfort in Jesus? Or, do you think you’re ok enough? Would you have trusted in the temple sacrifices or in Jesus? You see, Jesus would grow up and be the once-for-all sacrifice on the cross. In taking sinner’s punishment, he atones for all who trust in him! So, in Mary and Joseph going to the temple, we see one way in which Jesus fulfills the law. He’s the One who purifies.

But, then there is another ceremony that Luke brings up here. He talks about the **firstborn** being holy to the Lord. This is another fascinating ceremony. According to Exodus 13, every firstborn animal or person was to be devoted to the Lord in a special sense. What is that special sense? Well, Exodus 13 goes on to give the answer when it says the following: ¹⁴ **And when in time to come your son asks you, ‘What does this mean?’ you shall say to him, ‘By a strong hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery. ¹⁵ For when Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the Lord killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of animals. Therefore I sacrifice to the Lord all the males that first open the womb, but all the firstborn of my sons I redeem.’**⁴

In essence, there is a redemption and a sacrifice that takes place regarding the firstborns in order to point all generations to the way in which God delivered His people. While people in Egypt died, it meant rescue for the Israelites. Therefore, it’s a somber yet joyful reminder that God brings justice and salvation. So, again, isn’t this offering a little ironic as well? Jesus is the firstborn male of Mary. And, Jesus came to be a sacrifice and to redeem people – to pay the sufficient price so that they would be set free. He does this by being the firstborn – not only the firstborn of Mary, but the firstborn over all creation. The Scriptures go on to call Him the firstborn of creation in Colossians 1. And, this is not merely speaking in a birth order sense, but in the sense of Him being preeminent over all things. Colossians 1:15 calls Him the “firstborn of creation” and then in verse 18 calls Him the “firstborn of the dead.” Clearly Jesus wasn’t the first to raise from the dead – for others raised before Him. But, the nature of Christ’s resurrection was definitively different than everyone else. He raised, never to die again, and His resurrection guaranteed anyone else’s resurrection from the dead. Therefore, the word “firstborn” carries with it the ideas of one possessing grandest power and authority – and one who can purchase salvation.

So, is it any wonder that almost immediately before Paul calls Jesus the “firstborn of creation,” he says in verse 14 that in Jesus “. . . we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”⁵ And, as a result of Jesus’ sacrifice, anyone who calls on Him for salvation – on the basis of who He is and what He’s done – will find themselves being pulled away from the slavery and bondage of our sin and bathed in the cleansing power of God’s Spirit, being granted the title of “children of God.”

³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Pe 3:18.

⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ex 13:14–15.

⁵ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Col 1:14.

Look at these verses, Ventura! While Joseph and Mary are bringing their sacrifices and obey the Lord – everything they’re doing is pointing to all the things that Jesus is going to fulfill! He brings atonement. He brings redemption. He will be the sacrifice. And, we find great peace in our Prince of Peace who is the firstborn, consecrated Messiah and Lord!

2. Jesus must be the sufficient comforter (vv. 25-27)

Now, some of you may wonder if I’m reading too much into this text, but I don’t believe so. These points are brought out with greater clarity when we meet the man named Simeon. As I mentioned before, Simeon is nowhere else mentioned in the Scriptures or even outside of the Bible. All we know is what Luke tells us here, and he doesn’t tell us much. Many people have made assumptions about him. Some people have said that he was old because he says, “Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace,”⁶ but just because he says that he can die in peace doesn’t mean that he is old. Others have made the assumption that he was a priest because this took place in the temple. Yet, these verses almost give a feel that Mary and Joseph were interrupted on their way to make their sacrifices when the text says, “So he came by 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.”⁷ The way Luke writes, it seems to sound as though this one of those seemingly chance moments that can’t be chance because the Lord had to have been in it!

Joseph and Mary walk into the temple. Simeon is living under the direction of the Holy Spirit. And, here they meet one another.

Let’s just take a moment, though, to understand what Luke wants us to know about Simeon. While we don’t know much, we do know this. He was righteous and devout. The Holy Spirit was upon Him and he waited for the consolation of Israel.

To be righteous and devout meant that he was righteous in God’s sight, and he lived righteously because he is righteous in God’s sight!⁸ Or, we might say “he was justified and living out his sanctification!” Then we’re told that the Holy Spirit was upon Him. We are told that the Holy Spirit revealed to Simeon that he would not die until he saw the Lord’s Christ. Simeon is an example of a man who leaned not on his own understanding and was keeping in step with the Spirit’s guidance – as we are commanded to live out as well. And Simeon waited for the Consolation of Israel. As Simeon was walking in the Spirit, his heart was yearning for the consolation of Israel. The word “consolation” is the same word used to speak of the Holy Spirit as the comforter. Since the Holy Spirit is God and Jesus is God, it is understandable that Jesus is the comforter as well.

In reference to Jesus, this phrase refers us back to various Old Testament passages. Isaiah 40:1 says, **“Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. ²Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned. . .”**⁹ Isaiah 61:1-2 says, **“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; ² to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; ¹⁰**

⁶ *The New King James Version*. 1982 (Lk 2:29). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁷ *The New King James Version*. 1982 (Lk 2:27–28). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁸ MacArthur, John. *MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Luke 1-5*. Chicago: Moody Press. see pp. 176-177.

⁹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Is 40:1–2.

¹⁰ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Is 61:1–2.

Do you hear these words? Jesus is the consolation of Israel. But, as we will see in a moment. Jesus is not only the consolation of Israel, but He brings comfort to the entire world! Oh, how we need this message. In so many ways and for so many reasons, we cry out to Jesus for comfort and consolation. Why do babies die? Why is there injustice? Why is there suffering? Why can't we make ends meet? Why are my temptations so strong? Why?

Do you feel a need for comfort? I want to encourage you that Jesus' entrance into the world is a sign that peace and comfort have come. And, not only that, but we who know the rest of the story can also say that we know that Jesus' death and resurrection are a sign that He is coming again to give complete comfort. Someday justice will flow like rivers and there will be no more sorrow or sadness. And, Jesus will wipe away every tear from every eye. In Christ, we find comfort and consolation!

Oh how I hope that you find comfort and consolation in Him. May your heart rest steadfastly in His care. And, while we don't have all the answers, we can say that our God is still God and our God is always good towards His children – even when things don't make sense! Praise the Lord that we have a comforter in Jesus. And, praise the Lord that we have the Holy Spirit today who comforts us day-by-day because of God's immeasurable grace!

Simeon believed and trusted in these realities. He saw Jesus, as a baby, as the sufficient comforter. The only comforter! But, Luke doesn't stop here. I want to end today by focusing on the praise and prophecy of Simeon. In this prophecy, we find the application that should come to us when we gaze on Jesus like Simeon did.

Simeon praises the Lord because God has kept His Word! God always keeps his promises. But, the joy that Simeon has is not only in the fact that God keeps His promises. If God promised destruction to me, I don't think I'd be too happy about that. No, God's promise was for Simeon to see the Christ. And, note the wording of Simeon. He sees salvation. Jesus is salvation! I hope you know this, Ventura. I hope each and every person knows what Simeon is saying. Salvation is not a bunch of abstract truths coming together and being agreed upon. Salvation isn't simply doing the right things in the right order. Salvation is Jesus! Do you know him? Do you trust him? Will you praise him?

Isn't that's what's being expressed by Simeon. He can't help but praise God because he sees Jesus! And, this has been a part of the plan of God. God prepared Jesus to come in the flesh in the presence of all peoples. And this is what should stop us in our tracks. Everyone here today is what the Bible would call a Gentile. I don't believe there are any natural born Jews here. Yet, you're worshipping the God of the Jews. How?! Jesus did not come only for the Jews, but for all people – the Gentiles included. He is a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to Israel.

In the song *Silent Night*, we find these lyrics: "Son of God, love's pure light, Radiant beams from Thy holy face, With the dawn of redeeming grace, Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth." Redemption (or, atonement), Lordship, Light. And, the aspect of light really hit me in *Silent night*. Jesus is Love's pure light. All other lights flicker. Jesus pierces through all darkness. Radiant beams of grace shine forth from His face, declaring to the whole world that the Savior has come!

Oh, if people would only LOOK to Jesus. They would be saved, finding glory and joy in Him. It is no wonder that Simeon exclaimed the way he did – even saying that he's ready to die now. We can only imagine how Mary and Joseph were feeling at this moment. Comfort has come. Redemption and atonement are assured in Jesus – the One who saves His people from their sin! I'm sure there was wonder, amazement and joy coming from Mary and Joseph at this moment. And for us, this is the type of response we should have when we ponder Jesus come to this earth!

And, I could end the sermon here; however, Simeon goes on to declare news that makes your heart sink. There's a seeming turn for the worse here in verses 33-35.

3. Jesus must be the sacrifice in place of sinners (vv. 33-35).

Simeon says something that Mary already knows, that ¹¹“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.’”¹¹ Mary said similar things in her praise when she found out she was pregnant. Yet, this is a good reminder to us as well. This prophecy states that those who are weak will become strong and those who are strong will become weak. Or, as Jesus said, “I have not come to call *the* righteous, but sinners, to repentance.”¹² Or, “For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it.”¹³ We saw this type of ministry in Jesus with the Pharisees, Scribes, the poor, the wealthy, the sinners. Many repented and many rejected. But, the entry of Jesus made clear what side people were on. And, Jesus' ministry continues to this day. He did not come to condemn the world, but the world was already condemned. He came to save. But, we will see how remains condemned by how they respond to Jesus. And, I pray that you would respond to Christ with true belief – true humility, desiring for Him to save and forgive you of your sins against God!

But, you may say, “Why should I?” I'm actually afraid that many people have downplayed salvation. We hear people often say, “God is love! God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life,” and I actually get frustrated with that message sometimes. I know that may shock some of you, but I do. The reason is because I think people can portray a false message of love and God's forgiveness. Many people share a message of forgiveness that has no real awareness of what we deserve and what Jesus deserved.

Do you realize that salvation comes at a cost? I wonder if Mary and Joseph knew it. You see, Simeon added something to his prophecy. He said, “a sword will pierce through your own soul also.”

I can't imagine the pain of Mary. I can only get faint glimpses in my own children – but they are faint. Our son, Elisha, was born at 34 ½ weeks. After being born, he was having some more significant breathing issues. They had to do a couple procedures, and he was all connected up to various machines. If he was having issues for two hours, they said they'd have to transfer him to a different hospital. Elisha, made it to one hour and forty-five minutes having issues and they finally got better. I will tell you this, that was a concerning time. We prayed and we didn't want to see our little boy in pain. Now, some people who are nurses or doctors will hear that story and said, “Well, that's normal. It was no big deal.” But, it was a big deal to us. And, consider 100 years ago. Our son would have probably died. So, we are grateful for modern technology. It saved my son. But this is a small thing in comparison to what Jesus is going to do.

Most commentators believe that this is referencing the cross of Jesus. And, I lean that direction as well. Jesus was born to die! How was He going to make atonement? How was He going to declare us righteous? How was He going to save? He can only save if He is the One who becomes the sacrifice – instead of us enduring the penalty of our sins.

Listen, for Jesus to be the Savior means that there is bad news. And, we more greatly appreciate saving when the problem is more intense. Remember when Jesus shared the parable about a person who was forgiven little and one who was forgiven much and then he says, “Who will love more?” The response was that those who were forgiven much will love much. Some people walk away from that parable saying, “Well, I guess I won't love God much because I really wasn't that bad,” but that's not the

¹¹ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Lk 2:33–34.

¹² *The New King James Version*. 1982 (Lk 5:32). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

¹³ *The New King James Version*. 1982 (Lk 9:24). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

conclusion of that parable. The conclusion of the parable is that we all need to see just how bad our sin, and when we do, we will love Jesus much!

So, let me ask you, do you know how sinful you are? Do you know how great a salvation Jesus has provided? So, right now, your heart is being revealed. Where are you at? Is Jesus your comforter? Is Jesus your mediator who atones for your sin?

As you ponder God, do you think you're good enough? Or, do you feel the pain of failure, knowing you need God to wipe your slate clean and give you Jesus' righteousness instead of your own? Oh Ventura, may we glory in the light of the World – the One who is our joy and salvation.

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