

**Home : Sermons : Oct 9, 2005**

The Consolation of Israel - *Luke 2:21-52*

Introduction - Everything the temple represented Jesus fulfilled. Everything the Law pointed to Jesus fulfilled. Everything the prophets spoke of Jesus fulfilled. Everything a man who has humbled himself before God hopes for Jesus fulfills. Everything God has promised for the nations Jesus will fulfill.

Jesus at the Temple - The temple is the locus of God's presence among men. It is also considered the center of the world to Israel; and it is here that the universal reach of the gospel is proclaimed (vv27, 37, 46, and then vv31-32). Of course, all that the temple represented was fulfilled in Jesus. In the temple, Jesus is embraced by Simeon, praised by Anna, and later amazes all the teachers.

The Sign of Circumcision (v21) - Jesus was born under the law (Gal 4:4) and did not come to abrogate the law, but to fulfill it (Matt 5:17). Joseph and Mary were faithful Jews, following all the laws required of them, and so they have Jesus circumcised on the eighth day (as well as following the purification laws for Mary and the offerings for the firstborn for Jesus - vv22-24). The cutting off of the foreskin was required so that the child would not be cut off from God (Gen 17:14). This testimony of God to man declared that fallen man was disqualified and unclean before God. Man's hope could never be found in his generation, but only in regeneration (Deut 30:6). Performed on the eighth day, it represented the new beginning, the new week of creation. Performed on a passive child it set forth that justification, regeneration, and sanctification were all by grace and not of works.

Ironically, circumcision became a sign that the Israelites believed marked them out as special people by generation, when it was declaring just the opposite. Jesus would teach that those who were Abraham's descendants in one sense (John 8:37) were not in another sense (8:39) because they trusted in their heritage.

But did Jesus need to be circumcised then? Here was His identification with our race, One who would, as one puritan put it, "shed His blood for us when He was but eight days old."

Two or Three Witnesses (vv25-40) - The Holy Spirit directs both Simeon (v25, 26, 27) and Anna (a prophetess - v36) to Jesus in the midst of the busy temple to give testimony of the Messiah. Simeon had been promised that he would see the Consolation of Israel before he died. Anna was devoted to God, having been a faithful bride to her earthly husband (7 years) she had faithfully served at the temple (7 times 12, or 84 years). She is, symbolically speaking, the representative of godly Israel; the faithful bride of God.

Foreshadowing at Twelve (vv41-52) - Here Luke is foreshadowing the entire gospel. Jesus and His parents journey from Galilee to Jerusalem for Passover (as Jesus will later). After celebrating Passover, Jesus is "lost" and after three days, He is "found." People are confused by the whole thing, and Jesus teaches that it is "necessary" for these things to happen (compare with Luke 24). Here is the Consolation of Israel: it is necessary for Jesus to be lost and found, to die and rise again for His people.

Truly also this points out that for people who have some idea of Jesus, they often find Him more elusive than they had imagined. He does not easily fit into our preconceived boxes of the 'nice-guy', as will become more and more obvious through Luke. Jesus is about His Father's business.

The Consolation of Israel (*the Nunc Dimmitis* - vv29-32) - First, imagine Simeon's emotions as he took up into his arms and held the Comfort of Israel, the Savior of the world. What thoughts filled this true and faithful Israelite? This song is saturated in Isaiah's prophecies, the prophecies Jesus has come to fulfill. The Comfort (Consolation) of Israel has come (Is 40:1-2). We now "see the salvation of our God" (Is 52:10). Salvation and light are connected (Is 51:4-5), and this light is for all the world (Is 42:6, 49:6). "Salvation" has come to the temple of God. Salvation has come to the world.

The Sword of Suffering (vv33-35) - Light is not only a metaphor for consolation, but also for eschatological crisis - it can refer to judgment as well (Ps 37:6 - He will bring forth your righteousness as the light and your justice as the noonday). As Simeon turns to Mary, he makes clear that Jesus comes into the world as this great Light of crisis, the One destined to reveal the secret thoughts of those opposed to Him, those who will one day cry, "we have no king but Caesar!"

Longing. Suffering. Waiting. But God's Son will deal with all the suffering of the world by entering into the suffering Himself. His mother's heart will even be pierced with the sword. She will see her own people reject and crucify her own son and Savior. Great conflict and opposition to Jesus will come up from within God's own people, "a sign which will be opposed."

The Falling and Rising Again of Many - There is an unmistakable anticipation of the coming conflict surrounding the mission of Jesus. There will be no such thing as a neutral attitude towards Him or His gospel. Every man is doomed in himself, and there is no salvation except for those who come to Jesus. But many would contradict the sign of salvation and resist Him, even to His crucifixion. This rejection brought about the fall of the temple, the fall of Jerusalem, and the end of the special place as God's chosen people.

But the same truth remains today - what is your attitude towards Jesus? Through and in Him we fall down before God in utter humility only to be lifted up again, exalted in Christ - or we stand against Him and find that, in the end, we are crushed in His Light of Justice. See the Consolation of Israel and believe (John 3:36, 5:24). Humble yourself before Him now (Acts 17:30-31). Fall upon Him and be broken, to be lifted up by Him; do not stand afar off only to be crushed.

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