

**BEHOLD YOUR SAVIOR!
A CHRISTMAS MESSAGE ©**

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Paul R. Shockley, PhD

www.prshockley.org

²² Now when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord ²³ (as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every male who 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 And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just 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 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 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 Which You have prepared before the face of all peoples,

³² A light to *bring* revelation to the Gentiles, And the glory of Your people Israel.”

³³ And Joseph and His mother^[a] marveled at those things which were spoken of Him. ³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, “Behold, this *Child* is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against ³⁵ (yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed” [NKJV]

I. Introduction: “Oh, God Where Art Thou?”

You feel that God is silent:

In many of my classes there are certain students who tend to stand out among the rest. In one particular class at A&M one of those outstanding students asked for my counsel. We arranged a time to talk and this is a portion of his story. Raised in a godly home, unafraid to share the gospel, and a music leader who led churches in worshipping our beloved Lord, he hid within himself a painful problem, one that plagued him to such an extent that he found himself being swallowed up by severe depression. With a voice that began to choke, he softly cried out to me, “*Professor Shockley, I can’t feel God! Where is He?*” Because He could not feel God he found himself seriously doubting God’s existence. Indeed, *where is God?*

If some of us were honest, really honest, this is a question we may have asked deep within our hearts and one whereby we have not found an adequate, competent answer. But, to be honest, I’m not just addressing those of us who have this angst, this existential struggle within about God’s presence this Christmas season. There are people this morning who are hurting, afflicted, and burdened by problems, issues, and what seem to be insurmountable. Perhaps some us feel like we cannot tread the water anymore, we are on the edge of giving up. Where’s the rescue ship? “*God, where are you? I need you!*” “God, we call out to You but you are silent.”

For some of us, the Christmas season is no longer a beautiful experience. From single parents to widows, from those of us who have outlived our loved ones, to those of us are haunted by frightening memories of our childhood, from men and women in the military, to those whose family members might be in prison Christmas can be tough! And the silence seems to continue.

You have loss hope:

When you feel like *you are alone*, stuck in a quagmire, overwhelmed by circumstances that continue to change and yet not change, that is get better, you can *lose hope* real quick. God, where are you? Just consider:

Your marriage is not where it is supposed to be and you have come to the conclusion that recovery is not possible.

You are estranged from a loved one (s) and it seems like it is beyond repair.

Your life-long dreams are crushed by certain choices and you think it is impossible to put the pieces back together again.

You look back at your life and it seems wasted. Your best years are spent and you now live in regret.

The optimist you once were has been replaced with melancholy. Your happiness has turned to sadness. You've been hurt. Callousness sits on your shoulders but pain you experienced has found pertinent expression. People are watching to see if the pain you are carrying will morph into bitterness or even apathy.

Are you suffocating? Do you feel caught in a web of mundane, routine living? You get up, you work, and you go to bed. You used to dream big, but those dreams have dissipated into thin air. You ask yourself repeatedly, "Is this all that there is?" You hope there is more to life but each day is like the day before. Your past, present, and future is a blur. No experience is memorable, no striking moments where joy finds expression, whereby delight is awakened, and beauty is touched.

Are you suffering with guilt? You are carrying this burden of regret and if you are honest, you know that you have hurt those who love you the most. But the injury you did to them has also marred if not extracted some of the best parts of your person (e.g., innocence). You look at yourself in the mirror and you see the scarring results of your own choices. How you wish you made different choices and now you live with this great burden. The mere talk of forgiveness is an empty promise. Hope of freedom from this pain seems futile.

Have all the changes that occur around you and *in* you displace the hope you once embraced. Has anticipation of better days been taken snatched from you?

If these two themes, namely, *the silence of God* and *the loss of hope* have found pertinent expression in your life, realize you are not alone. *You are not alone! This has been the plight of millions of people who have*

gone before you. In fact, in addition to change, oppression, and violence, the silence from God and loss of hope were two themes that resonated in the early first century among the Jewish people.

God was silent. No prophets were found offering words of hope, deliverance, and freedom as the mouthpiece of God. The Romans had control over a country that was once ruled by people like King David. As we know, waves of oppression occurred because Israel's leaders and many of her people put their trust in sources other than the God of the Bible; they relished in sin, pursued the path of pride rather than depending upon Jehovah is both infinite and personal.

To be sure some had hope, but their hope was misplaced. This false hope was expressed by those who were looking for a political Messiah who would redeem them from Roman oppression but allow them to live the way they want to live on their terms. Since their hope was not rooted in what the whole Hebrew Bible prophesied, namely, a Messiah, a God-man, who will come, born of a virgin a blood related and legal Davidic Heir, and He will fulfill the Biblical Covenants promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I suspect that some of those who embraced this false hope, which was rooted in such vices as selfishness, pride, and selectivity, were some of the same people who shouted that this Messiah be crucified.

But even before in the midst of corruption, evil, loss, and misplacement, there was one man whose hope was not crushed. In the midst of self-serving religious leaders, oppressive authorities, and horrific acts of evil, a wise godly man, had appropriate hope, biblical hope, a confident trust in God and His promise. The hope this man of God had was not rooted in that which changes, but in what does not change, namely, God's promises rightly understood. Who was this person? His name was Simeon; his testimony, along with Anna's is another authenticating evidence of Jesus as that Messiah predicted in the Hebrew Bible.

II. Summary of Luke 2:22-35:

Read Luke 2:22-35:

Let's set the scene: 40 days following the birth of Jesus and just prior to the visit of the wise men, baby Jesus was taken on his first journey by Joseph and Mary. The journey was approximately a 5 five mile

journey from Bethlehem to Jerusalem. Perhaps the same donkey that carried Mary to Bethlehem would be the same to carry both Mary and baby Jesus to Jerusalem.

Just imagine Jerusalem at this time. In the northeastern corner of the city the beautifully white stoned Temple in Jerusalem was nearing completion. It was a magnificent Temple. It had a sprawling enclave rimmed with a labyrinth of colonnaded porticoes and gates. For pious and faithful Jews and Gentile proselytes, this was the center of the world. At this point nothing unusual occurs; people are living out their daily lives. Everything is routine.

In verses 22-24 we come to discover that Joseph and Mary, two faithful followers of God, are fulfilling the ceremonial requirements with the first born child. They travel to Jerusalem to go to the Temple with double purpose in mind: purification from ceremonial uncleanness and the redeeming of the first born son from priestly service.

A mother was ceremonially defiled by the birth of a child. Thus, it was not that she sinned because she gave birth. Ceremonial uncleanness was not always due to sin. Now the Law of Moses required that women had to purify themselves after childbirth by offerings at the Temple forty days after the birth of a boy and eighty after that of a girl. Moreover, we also need to understand that the Law required consecrating to God every firstborn male (Exodus 13:2). God claimed the firstborn son in each family as His own possession. But after the institution of the Levitical Priesthood in the family of Aaron, God commanded His people to redeem their firstborn. So, every male child not born in the Tribe of Levi was required to be redeemed from priestly service (Numbers 18:15-16).

Though special for the parents and God Himself, everything that happened so far in the Temple presentation was normal. Nothing unusual! I'm confident firstborns were being presented regularly.

But all of a sudden, the normalcy of the event took an unexpected turn. There they were, namely, Joseph, Mary, and forty-day old baby in the Court of the Women at the magnificent Temple when a righteous and devout man named Simeon walked purposefully over to them. Simeon has been waiting for the fulfillment of messianic expectations as predicted in Hebrew Bible.

Just in this small portion of Luke we see Simeon's moment with His Savior, a moment uniquely designed by God for him. The Holy Spirit revealed to Simeon that He would not die before He had seen Christ; The Holy Spirit directed Simeon to go into the temple courts which specifically coordinated with Joseph and Mary's presentation of Jesus in the Temple.

Let's pause and consider. What were Simeon's expectations after he was told that He would see His Savior? What was he envisioning? Was he looking for the Messiah cloaked in drama? On that day Simeon did not see His Savior taking the title as Conquering King. He does not see the Messiah coming into the Temple on a white horse through the Eastern Gate with eyes like fire and a countenance as bright as the Sun (Revelation 1). No, Simeon sees his Messiah as a newborn baby wrapped up and being carried by two poor people. He saw Him as a newborn baby and not as a man like other heroes of the faith: Abraham, Jacob, Moses, and David.

Here's my first major point to you: **Do not pursue the dramatic. Look at the ordinary and if you will open your eyes and look around, the ordinary becomes extraordinary.** Nothing dramatic has occurred yet Simeon sees His Savior perhaps in a most unexpected way. Was he disappointed? I suspect not! It didn't matter. He saw His redeemer! He beheld His Savior. The only reason why He did not miss it was the ministry of the Holy Spirit in his life.

The young man from A&M was looking for God in the dramatic. But what he couldn't see before him was the extraordinary in the ordinary. In a following conversation who I asked that young man if he had ever led people to Jesus Christ. He said "yes." Is that not an evidence of God's presence? I asked him if he saw believers dramatically turn their lives around from a path of rebellion against God to a path of abandonment to Him. He said "yes." I asked him if ever saw anyone unexpectedly healed (a bonafide healing). He said, "Yes!" I asked him if he ever received answered prayer. He said, "Yes!" I replied to these affirmations by him by asking, "Why isn't this sufficient for you? "

Simeon was looking for the Consolation of Israel but with obedient eyes. He was just looking, waiting, and allowing God to direct His footsteps. Are you?

I do not know if you have ever done this, but one of my favorite scholars, Dr. Gary Habermas, and his wife, for several years documented every prayer request they offered to God. They discovered that God answered 67% of their requests their way. What does all this say? It says that God's presence is seen in the ordinary events of our lives but in extraordinary ways. The young man's only criterion was the dramatic. He wanted to have a dramatic encounter with God. Often times, dramatic events that come about are not enough; we want more! But if we only look at the dramatic, it will only take another dramatic event; we have an insatiable thirst for it!

But once again, don't pursue the dramatic! Look at the ordinary and if you will open your eyes, the ordinary becomes extraordinary. Simeon did not see Jesus come down from Mount of Olives on a white horse; he saw him as a forty-day old baby. But at the same time, don't dismiss the dramatic when it does come as the Scripture proclaims.

Said differently, God uses the dramatic. Miracles demonstrated by Jesus in his earthly ministry were uses of the dramatic. But they were dramatic events that authenticated the fact that this is the predicted Messiah. Consider the scene at the crucifixion: The sky became dark, the curtain to the Holy of Holies torn in two from top to bottom, and people came out of their graves. Centurion responded positively to the dramatic by saying, "Surely this is the Son of God!" In fact, anticipate the dramatic as the Bible proclaims it to be. But don't live for it.

No Simeon trusted God with the revelation given to Him. This should not be surprising to us because Luke describes Simeon as righteous (upright) and devout (God-honoring). He was looking for the restoration of Israel. In other words, though his circumstances looked bleak given Rome's occupation with Israel, Simeon really trusted God's promise that the Messiah would come and deliver the nation (Isaiah 40:1; 49:13; 51:3; 57:18; 61:2). What trust; what hope! He believed God would end Israel's time of alienation and suffering through the advent of the Messiah! Lastly, The Holy Spirit was upon Him.

After his praise to God for the fulfillment of that revelation to behold the Christ Child, Simeon, who describes himself as a servant, states in a prophetic proclamation concerning the Jesus Christ. Simeon declares, "***My eyes Have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the***

presence of all peoples (vv. 30-31). In Sum, Jesus is going to bring "revelation to pagans and glory to Israel."

What is Joseph and Mary's response to this revelation? In spite of all that already know and ponder, they marveled! You wonder why? Perhaps it is because they had not considered the fact that His ministry would extend to all peoples.

Perhaps between his prayer and his blessing upon the parents, a very sobering thought occurred to Simeon: Since Simeon is seeing the Messiah as a baby, at the very beginning of Jesus' earthly life, the events to follow are not going to be pleasant.

In verses 33-35 Simeon predicts that this son is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel. See, many in Israel would be brought to a moral decision, some to a point of collapse and others to what can well be called a resurrection. He will proclaim that the only way to the kingdom, something the nation had long sought, was to follow Him. There will be a cost to Jesus. As the one who Himself is the ultimate "sign," the visible affirmation of God's intentions, he will be vulnerable to the hostility of unbelievers. And this grief because of the hostility directed toward Mary's son, would be terribly painful to her, like a sword piercing her soul.¹ This event began following the wise men's famous visit. Herod became so enraged that he massacred children two and under in and around Bethlehem (Matthew 2:13-18).

The future, though filled with hope, will not be pleasant to watch given the fact that this baby is the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 52:13-53:12.

See, unlike other religions across this world, this is a God who is predicted to suffer evil by not only dying a horrific death as an innocent man, but is also the One who will take our sins upon Himself. The God-Man suffered with us. Jesus was not afar. Jesus was not aloof. Jesus was not silent; Jesus experienced evil, deprivation, loneliness, and pain too. On the cross we not only see both injustice since an innocent man was being executed and a display of hatred by His own people, but we also see the convergence of infinite love, peace, meaning, and hope.

¹ Bible Knowledge Commentary, ed. Walvoord & Zuck, Luke 2:34-5.

Here on the Cross of Calvary that Jesus Christ paid your debt of sin so that you may have eternal life. The only condition for receiving this free gift of salvation is in the open arms of faith by placing trust in Jesus Christ, believing that He is God, who died on the cross for your sins and rose bodily from the dead. While you have air to breathe, this opportunity to receive eternal life is extended to you.

But here Simeon was directed by the Holy Spirit to be at the right place at the right time. He was blessed with a unique moment with His Savior that was specifically designed for him; a promise was fulfilled; Scriptural fulfillment was predicted; Prophecy was given to Mary. Simeon describes himself as a servant. *All of this was Spirit-directed.* We too should be Spirit-directed as we go about our daily lives. God's presence is not only among His people but is now in His people, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Do not merely anticipate the dramatic as the Bible proclaims it to be, but allow the dramatic to live through you by means of the Holy Spirit.

In other words, you too need to be Spirit-directed. When you abide in Jesus Christ, serving Him and those He loves, you will bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit. As a result, people will see Jesus Christ through you. Dr. J. Dwight Pentecost defines the spiritual life this way in his super book, *Designed to be Like Him*. He states, "The life of the believer is the life of Jesus Christ reproduced in the child of God by means of the Holy Spirit."

In the particular moment that you are dependent upon and controlled by the Holy Spirit, walking with Him in intimacy, you are able to do such things as:

- Love the unlovely;
- Resist temptation;
- Be joyful regardless of trials;
- Be enabled to stand alone with confidence even if everyone is against you;
- Control the tongue;
- Be poured out for the glory of God given your divine design (e.g., spiritual gifts; natural talents; temperament).
- Meet practical needs even it costs you (e.g., material resources, energy; time).

To be sure, there really is not a feeling that comes with the Holy Spirit's presence; we have to know that He is there in His Word and we see evidences in it when we bear the fruit of the Spirit and our spiritual gifts are used. In other words, allow Christ to touch lives through you! Commit yourself to the true good of another person. Allow the dramatic to live through you.

III. Conclusion:

Do not pursue the dramatic; look for the extraordinary in the ordinary. But anticipate the dramatic as the Bible proclaims it to be. But don't merely anticipate the dramatic; allow the dramatic to live through you.