

**FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH**  
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**SCRIPTURE:** *Luke 2:25-35*

**DATE:** *December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2020*

**LOCATION:** *Auditorium (Bill)*

**SERMON:** *Through the Eyes of Simeon*

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*(Acknowledgement to Tim Keller for his sermon on "Peace Through Conflict")*

**Simeon (John Heishman)**

*Today...finally...the wait is over.*

*How long has it been? How many years have passed since the Lord God promised me that I would not leave this world until I beheld – with my own eyes - "the consolation of Israel"? The long awaited Messiah.*

*It was so long ago.*

*And yet, I still remember that initial anticipation.*

*But, days turned into months...months turned into years...years became decades.*

*I have to admit there were times when I found myself doubting that this promise actually came from the Lord, and was no more than wishful thinking on my part.*

*And then this morning happened.*

*As sometimes happens, I felt God's Spirit move me to go to the temple courts. I was unsure why at the time, but obedient to my Lord, I went...and as I approached the temple, I found myself uncertain as to which gate to enter, even as I sensed that somehow, it mattered.*

*Passing by each of the four gates along the northern wall, I rounded the temple and walked along the southern wall, until I felt compelled to enter through "The Gate of the Firstborn."*

*As I slowly climbed the steps leading to the entrance, I remember my heart beginning to pound, and no, it wasn't because of my age. No, my heart began pounding as I felt something begin to stir within me.*

*I passed through the gate, and I was not there long before I heard a cry...the cry of an infant...a baby...and it was at that instant I knew the Lord's promise to me...a promise made many years*

*before...was now being fulfilled. This cry that I heard was coming from the One who was the Messiah.*

*After all these years! I had no idea when He would appear. Nor did I know where...or how. But here He was. An infant...a baby! It was clear He was only a few weeks old.*

*As I approached the child, resting in His mother's arms, I turned my gaze upon her and the father. And was pleased to discover that they would allow me to take this child into my arms without hesitation. And again, moved by the Spirit, I found myself offering words of spontaneous praise to my Lord. The Lord was using me to proclaim what this child would mean: Salvation...Revelation. And not just to myself...not just to the nation of Israel...but incredibly, to the Gentiles as well...to the whole world!*

*I could see the baby's mother and father marveling as these words flowed from my lips, and I blessed them as I handed the child back over to them. As I did, once again God's Spirit prompted me to speak, this time directly to the mother.*

*Turning my gaze upon her, what came next from my mouth were not words of praise, not words of peace...but words speaking of the conflict that was to come: Many will rise and many will fall because of this child...He will be spoken against...hearts will be revealed...a sword will pierce the soul of the mother...and I believe in the end, the souls of many.*

*Having said all that I was led to say, I turned and walked through the gate, down the steps and returned here to my home.*

*But things are different now.*

*The waiting is over, but in a sense, a new one has begun.*

*Now I wait to leave this world...but now, I know I can depart in peace, knowing that God's promise to redeem the world has now become a reality, in the form of a child that I held in my own arms, just hours ago.*

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**“...You now dismiss your servant in peace,”** Simeon said as he held Jesus in his arms.

**Peace**, of course, is one of the themes of the Advent season, along with **Hope, Joy and Love**. As your pastors, every year we look at these themes and wonder what new insight we can offer...what can we bring out that has not been brought out before?

It seems to me that this year, these 4 topics take on added significance – to some degree – for all of us. This morning we're going to be focusing on Peace, and as I began preparing this message, I found myself asking God, *“What do You want to teach us, reveal to us, so that*

*Peace is more than just a theme that we look at every year at Advent...how can we experience it?"*

Because I know God is fully aware of what you and I are up against these days. There is incredible political upheaval, unlike anything we have experienced in our lifetime. There is this pandemic that has dramatically impacted how we go about our lives, and again, it's unlike anything any of us have experienced.

In addition to these things that to some degree impact all of us, each of us have our own personal experiences that we're dealing with...loneliness, broken relationships, health concerns apart from COVID, all kinds of things that can introduce fear, worry and anxiety into our lives.

And this is not God's intention...I believe with all my heart that God wants you to know His peace. He wants to bring stability and order and wholeness into your life. He wants you to sleep well at night.

Because of this, I believe that this morning He intends to show you – He intends to show all of us – some of the steps we need to take in order to experience His peace.

As I've studied this passage that we're going to be looking at, I can see that this is not going to be easy. But for those who want it, it's right here in front of us as we study God's word together.

Go ahead and open up your Bible, get out your device, or follow along on the screen as we turn our attention to the gospel of **Luke chapter 2:25-35** where we will look at Jesus through the eyes of **Simeon**.

As you find your way there, Let me explain the direction we will go this morning...we're going to be asking three questions: First, **What's Happening?** As we read the Scripture text, we're going to make sure we understand the background and all that is unfolding. Second question: **What's Noteworthy?** What does God want us to notice and explore deeper? And the third question: **What's Your Next Step?** In light of whatever it is that God says to you over the course of these next few minutes. what is the next step that He is asking you to take?

First question...

## 1. WHAT'S HAPPENING?

It would have been a little over a month ago that Joseph and Mary would have left their hometown of Nazareth and set off for Bethlehem because of the census...a 90 mile journey. No sooner do they arrive than Mary gives birth.

When Jesus is 8 days old, he is circumcised, and according to Jewish practice at that time, it was normally done in the home (not possible in this case), by the father (maybe), but the Scriptures do not give us much in the way of detail here.

Then they would have waited for a few weeks to pass before heading to Jerusalem...a much shorter journey, only 5 miles. But, why a few weeks and why Jerusalem?

It is at the temple in Jerusalem where Mary and Joseph will carry out a number of ceremonies according to God's law...the ***Redemption of the Firstborn*** and the ***Purification of the Mother***. And they had to wait 40 days, because when a mother would give birth, she would be considered "unclean" and would not be allowed to enter the temple for 40 days if she had given birth to a son...80 days if she had given birth to a daughter.

So, when Jesus is 40 days old, Joseph and Mary enter the temple, entering through **The Gate of the Firstborn (Picture)**. They would proceed to offer a sacrifice, a lamb and a pigeon preferably. But if the family was not able to afford a lamb, then two pigeons could be offered, and this is what Joseph and Mary did.

It's while all of this is taking place that Simeon arrives on the scene.

**Luke 2:25-35 Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:**

**“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.”**

**The child’s father and mother marveled at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.”**

This is Simeon’s story, in its entirety. All we know about him **(Bring up Luke 2:25)** is that he was righteous and devout, the Holy Spirit was on him...and one other very important thing...he was waiting.

Waiting for the fulfillment of the promise that God had made him...he would not die **(Bring up Luke 2:26)** until he had seen the Lord’s Christ.

And so one day he was moved by God’s Spirit to go to the temple, where he encountered Mary, Joseph and Jesus. Taking Jesus in his arms, he offers **words of praise and words of prophecy.**

Which leads us to the second question we’re asking this morning...

## **2. WHAT’S NOTEWORTHY?**

Are you familiar with this passage? I think a lot of people read this as a feel good story of an elderly man who spends years waiting for the Messiah to be born...and then one day it happens...and now he can die in peace. It’s heartwarming. But is this all there is to it?

You see, what we tend to overlook is this incredibly important **(Bring up Luke 2:34b-35)** turn that it takes, when Simeon begins to prophecy words that speak of the conflict that is to come because of Jesus’ birth. The rising of many and the falling of many...the fact that this child will be spoken against...hearts will be revealed...a sword piercing the soul of the mother.

Aren’t these words noteworthy? And if so, what do they really mean? And is this the kind of stuff we want to be talking about at this time of year?

So often at Christmas our focus is on and should be on **“Joy to the world...angels singing sweetly o’er the plains... tidings of comfort and joy.”** Good stuff.

Even Handel’s Messiah. Handel wrote it in the 1700’s with Easter in mind...hundreds of years later it’s landed here in the Christmas season. Every word of it comes directly from the Scriptures, and the last song of Handel’s Messiah is called *The Hallelujah Chorus*. It is majestic and it is glorious...men and women singing back and forth *“King of King (Forever, and ever)... and Lord of Lords! (Hallelujah! Hallelujah!)* the notes going higher and higher as it rises to this great crescendo: *“And He Shall Reign Forever and Ever!”*

It’s incredibly inspiring. If you’ve heard this, what do you envision when you hear this song?

Do you know the Scripture passage that this comes from? It’s Revelation 19...and Jesus is riding a white horse, his eyes are said to be like blazing fire, a sword is coming out of His mouth, and...

**Revelation 19:13a,16 He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood...On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.**

This is not the image of Jesus that I have pictured when I have listened to the Hallelujah Chorus in the past. This passage speaks of an incredibly dramatic and intense event that will one day come to pass...and it is not “angels singing sweetly” or “tidings of comfort and joy”.

There are two sides to Jesus’ coming. Through the eyes of Simeon, when we see Jesus, we not only see peace, but we see conflict as well.

You and I have to settle in our hearts who Jesus is, and we have to come to grips with the things that He says. Do we believe that He is the King of kings and Lord of lords, and that He has come to heal that which is broken and restore wholeness in our lives.

And for most of us – all of us – this doesn’t come easily, this doesn’t come without working through the implications, the cost involved in following Jesus as King of kings and Lord of lords. But it’s only by working through the conflict – **the Conflict Among Us and the Conflict Within Us** - that we will ever hope to experience the peace that God offers to each and every one of us.

Take a look at verse 34 which speaks of...

### A. The Conflict Among Us

In verse 34 (**Bring up Luke 2:34b**) we see that Jesus is destined to bring about the falling and the rising of many.

What this is saying is that we will not all be like-minded...not everybody is falling nor is everybody rising. There will be conflicting views when it comes to how we see Jesus. There will be those who will have no interest in Jesus and do not see Him as the one who can bring peace into our lives, into this world. At the same time, there will be those who will be raised up to a new life because they do see Jesus as having come to restore that which is broken. And so they follow Him wholeheartedly.

Conflicting views when it comes to who Jesus is and the things that He says.

And notice that **when we look at Jesus through the eyes of Simeon, it's one or the other...falling or rising. There's no middle ground** in other words.

But sometimes it seems like this is what we're looking for...some middle ground that we can settle on. A couple of weeks ago and I was in my car, and on the radio was a conversation taking place between two men, someone here in the States and someone with an English accent, and you could tell from the conversation that he lived on the other side of the Atlantic.

He was saying that others across the ocean **see the church in the United States identifying as Christians, but living like atheists.** And I thought, wow. What a disheartening thing to have said about the Church. What is it about our lifestyle that would cause him and others to view us that way? Maybe it's our materialism...maybe it's the attitudes our religious leaders convey when quoted by the media...perhaps the things we ourselves post on social media?

About a week later I came across a book written by Pastor Craig Groeschel, his book was called **"Believing in God But Living as if He Doesn't Exist." (Picture).** In this book he's basically saying the same thing as the guy on the radio, that is, the church here in the United States is trying to play it down the middle: Not wanting to be counted among the many who are falling...at the same time not living as one who has been raised to a new life in Christ.

May this never be said about those of us who make up the church here at Five Forks. To think that all we have to do is say we believe in Jesus, and then we're free to pick and choose in what areas we will follow Him or not...because no such Jesus exists...that's fantasy, that Jesus would be a myth.

He may have come as a baby, but He is God, the Messiah...and just like Simeon said, His coming is destined to cause conflict among us...conflicting views of who Jesus is and what He says.

May we be a church that is committed to knowing, loving and following Jesus as the King of kings and Lord of lords. May we come along side of one another, realizing we are in this together, and pray for each other and encourage and even challenge one another.

Having said all of that, I'd like you now to take a look at verse 35 and see that there are not only conflicting views among us, but also...

## **B. The Conflict Within Us**

See, now it becomes more personal. It's in verse 35 **(Bring up Luke 2:35)** that we see Simeon indicating that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed and then he talks about a sword piercing Mary's soul.

As he addresses Mary, Simeon is saying that she is going to experience pain in her life. But in a way, Mary represents those of us who are willing to take on and work through this question of who Jesus is and the expectations that He has for us.

J.C. Ryle was an archbishop who lived back in the late 1800's, and he said that ***"When someone makes a decision to follow Jesus, a new peace comes into your life, but at the same time, a new fight comes into your life."***

If you are one who has been raised up to a new life in Christ, you know exactly what Ryle is talking about here. You see, God's peace doesn't come without **The Sting of Repentance.**

Repentance is more than confession, more than regret or remorse. It's actually looking to Jesus to help us take the necessary steps that will allow us to walk in obedience with Him. And sometimes those steps can be costly, those steps can be painful.

In a way, repentance is like anti-septic. Every one of us knows what it's like to have a cut, or better yet, a brush burn that needs attention, right? Not too long after Karen and I were married, I was playing softball and slid into a base – in shorts – and went home with this huge brush burn on the side of my leg. So Karen gets out the hydrogen peroxide and pours it over the wound and – yowza! – I just about went through the ceiling.

Talk about pain...to say that it stung wouldn't do it justice. But it was necessary. You pour anti-septic onto a wound and at first, it stings like crazy. But it's healing. And this is exactly how repentance works.

It was C.S. Lewis who said, **“The only way to peace is to pass through the pain of exposure and repentance.”** We must take the necessary step of inviting God to search our hearts so that - as Simeon prophesied - reveal what is in our hearts...so we can take those necessary steps, make those changes in those areas of our lives that keep us from experiencing peace.

And so, in light of all this,...

### **3. WHAT'S YOUR NEXT STEP?**

God is looking to each one of us to do something in response to what we have looked at this morning. He is never about status-quo, content to let us remain where we are. He is always looking to teach us, help us to mature and draw closer to Himself through Jesus.

So what kind of response do you sense that He is looking for out of you?

Let me make a few suggestions, and let me start with any who are out there and you know that you've had no interest in Jesus, or God at all for that matter. When we looked at those who are said to be falling, you see yourself in the group. First, thank you for watching and for listening and hopefully for considering anything that God might be saying to you through His word. And...

**He's looking for *your next step* to be taken towards Jesus.**

You see, there is so much that is broken in this world and in our lives. Life is so complex with so many moving parts, and so Jesus came in order to restore order and stability...wholeness you might say – into our hearts and into our lives.

God really does want for you to experience wholeness - peace - in your life and He wants you to know you can't get it without being raised to life through Jesus.

Notice that when Simeon held Jesus in His arms and was giving praise to God, Simeon said **“My eyes have seen your salvation...”** He said that Jesus would be **“a light for revelation...”** Salvation and revelation...not just for some, but offered to everybody, including yourself.

God has been and continues to reveal Himself to you, and He wants you to envision your salvation, how it is possible for all the moving parts in your life to be into order...to know God and the peace of God, and to know that it all comes through Jesus. Take a step towards Him, and please let me know - Email me, call me here at the church, if you do.

For those of you who have already taken that step – you know His salvation and His revelation - let's all take the step of **making sure that as part of His church here in the United States, we are committed to Him as King of kings and Lord of lords.**

We go to the gospels and we read about who Jesus is and what He says and when we do, we don't see any middle ground, do we? What we do see is that Jesus is relentless when it comes to what He says about Himself and how He calls you and I to live.

We come to the end of His sermon on the mount, and we see Jesus saying that on that day when any of us stand before Him, whether we rise or whether we fall – forever with Him or forever separated from Him – it all depends on whether you know Him in a personal way...and do the will of His Father. It's exactly what Jesus says.

We read about Jesus' encounter with the rich young ruler and we see Jesus get right to the point, saying, *“I have to be more important to you than your wealth or anything else that you have...and if I am not, you are lost.”*

We hear Jesus saying, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny himself/deny herself and follow me.”

There is no middle ground anywhere to be found, and so may it never be said of us that we don't take Jesus or that things that He says all that seriously.

In the midst of political upheaval and this surging pandemic, let's help each other to keep our eyes on Jesus as He raises us to this new life that is found in Him...so that we may sleep well at night. May those in our community say this about us: We talk a lot about following Jesus, and we actually do it.

Finally, perhaps the next step for many of us is **to pass through the pain of exposure and repentance.**

If we're identifying as Christians...if we say we believe in God, then we have to live as if He exists and what He says matters. Back in September and October Shaun brought a sermon series where he addressed a number of sins that can be potentially fatal for a follower of Jesus.

I found them to be very challenging messages, for instance, we looked at Greed, how we view and handle what God has given us in light of what others have or don't have. Gluttony...talk about one that hits home for the church. Lust and pride and anger and deceit...and with every one of these, if we listen to these messages and then walk away and it's just "business as usual"...could it be that we are calling ourselves Christians...but in some ways living as if He doesn't exist? That some of the things He says aren't to be taken seriously?

These things – greed, gluttony, lust, pride - require us to go before God and invite Him to expose anything that we need to be aware...anything that might be impacting our ability to experience His peace in our lives.

I believe the next step for many of us is to pass through the pain of exposure and repentance. Those steps may be painful...but they are also healing.

## **CONCLUSION**

So this morning we've looked at Jesus through the eyes of Simeon. He sees Jesus, and He sees both peace and conflict. Peace for himself...conflict for you and for me.

My prayer for you – for all of us will be – that rather than avoiding the conflict, we will learn to embrace it, because once we are able to settle who Jesus is and commit to getting to know Him better, commit to following Him wholeheartedly in every facet of our lives...what will come out of that is a relationship with Him that is so meaningful, so life-changing...that no matter how unsettled things are in the rest of our lives...you cannot lose...there is nothing that can defeat you, destroy you...you belong to Him, He belongs to you...and this awareness allows us to experience a peace that passes understanding.

It's right here before us, so let's go get it.