

# God's Gift: The Falling and Rising of Many

## Luke 2:25-35

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This is the third message in our series, *To You, From Above*. We are seeing Jesus' incarnation from the perspective of a gift. A gift from who? God. To whom? The angels said it clearly, *"unto YOU is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord"* (Luke 2:11 ESV, emphasis added). These words echo the famous prophecy of Isaiah 9:6, *"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given."* This announcement was made to the lowly shepherds indicating that Jesus is a gift for everyone no matter where you are on the social ladder.

Last week we saw the Jesus gift as an indication of what we actually need. God sent a gift, and it wasn't an Amazon gift card or a plumber or a musician. Why? Our deepest need isn't met by more stuff, better plumbing, or more music. Although a good plumber is always welcome. Our deepest need is indicated by the one God sent.

Who did God send? God sent a Savior. The angel said what kind of Savior he would be, *"he will save his people from their sins"* (Matthew 1:21). This gift from God addresses the core need every human being has—we need to be made righteous before a holy God. Jesus meets that need by dying in our place for our sins and offering salvation by faith, apart from works, lest any man should boast.

Therefore, Jesus is the purest gift we will ever receive. There are no strings attached. It's not a transactional gift in which God gives in order to get. It flows from his sovereign love as an act of his sovereign grace for our eternal good and his eternal glory.

Today we skip slightly ahead from the actual birth of Jesus to the human pronouncement about Jesus. When he was born, the angels appeared and declared his glorious birth. Days later came the human version of the angelic announcement. You may be thinking, *Oh, the wise men, right?* Actually, they come much later; up to two years later. After the angels, and before the wise men, there was an obscure elderly man and woman who echo the angels' announcement, minus the glory light and the shepherds.

*"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 (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, 'Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord') and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, 'a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons'"* (Luke 2:22-24).

This was according to the Old Testament Law. Leviticus 12:1-4 requires a time of ceremonial purification for a woman after giving birth. After the purification, a first-born son was required to be presented to the Lord and "redeemed" from temple service with a payment of five shekels, or if you were too poor, the sacrifice of two doves. Mary and Joseph are careful to fulfill the law's requirements and make the five-mile journey from Bethlehem to the temple in Jerusalem for this ceremony.

Luke notes that they don't pay five shekels but rather two doves. This indicates the poverty into which Jesus was born. Imagine, all wealth and glory are his, but his parents could only afford two doves for their offering to God. Humble birth. Humble home. Humble family.

*"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. 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 2:25-26).*

We are introduced to this guy named Simeon. The text says he was *"righteous and devout."* He wasn't a priest. He wasn't a Levite. He was what we might call today, a layman. You know, godliness is not reserved for priests or pastors or missionaries. God looks at our hearts, not our titles. I personally think many who love and serve God without title or position will be more honored in heaven than many of us who have an official office in the church. Simeon was a faithful, God-fearing, God-loving man. In Simeon, God saw a man who had a passion for *"the consolation of Israel"* (v. 25). What's that? The consolation of Israel is messianic terminology. Simeon was one guy in Israel on Messiah watch. Simeon was so excited he couldn't wait for the Messiah to come.

There is a ministry in Wisconsin called The Shepherds Home. This ministry houses, cares for, and educates dear folks with special needs. I've been told that they have a hard time keeping their windows clean. Not on the outside, the inside. There are little smudge marks all over the windows as the residents look outside every day to see if today is the day Jesus returns.

How clean are your windows? Are you anticipating Jesus' coming? Simeon's windows were smudgy. He was on Messiah watch.

Interestingly, God had revealed to him that he wouldn't die before seeing the Messiah with his own eyes. Mary and Joseph had just arrived in the temple complex in Jerusalem to make an offering. As the three of them enter the temple court, here's Simeon's moment,

*"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, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, 'Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel'" (Luke 2:27-32).*

Simeon scoops Jesus into his arms and offers a prayer to God. Really more of a song. His heart is overflowing with joy. He was thrilled to see with his own eyes the very Messiah of God. He sings a song worthy of the Psalms; filled with Christological significance. Look what he says about this baby:

- *My eyes have seen your salvation (v. 30)*
- *In the presence of ALL peoples (v. 31)*
- *Light for...the Gentiles (v. 32)*
- *Glory to...Israel (v. 32)*

Nobody at that time could conceive of the scope of God's love and desire to save. The Jewish people were looking for a savior for the Jews. The Gentiles weren't looking for anything, except some wise men on the other side of the world.

I'm a Star Wars fan. I'm not a fanatic. I've never dressed up for a convention or anything. But I am a fan. This past year I got into the Star Wars story entitled *The Mandalorian*. I watched it while on the treadmill and it helped me not think about the pain I was

experiencing. It too has a child in it and the storyline revolves around the mysterious identity of this little green guy. He's really small but the galactic empires are desperate to find him. Small, yet extreme importance.

That is the intrigue in this moment here. Joseph and Mary appear to be just another poor Jewish couple coming to make their birth offering. There's no halo over them. There's no halo over Jesus. He's 40 days old. Small. Apparently helpless. But if the hustle and bustling crowds had realized who he actually was, the city and the nation would have fallen in worship.

But the crowds didn't know. Only Simeon knew and he knew because God had revealed to him the true identity of this child. Jesus represented not only salvation for the Jews, but light for the Jews AND the Gentiles. A Savior for the whole world.

Who does he sound like? He sounds like the angels who sang a similar song over Jesus. Have you ever noticed all the songs around Jesus' birth? There are five Christmas hymns in the first two chapters of Luke.

- Elisabeth responds with praise (1:42)
- Mary's Magnificat is a song of praise (1:46ff.)
- Zechariah breaks out in praise (1:67ff.)
- The multitude of angels praise God (2:13ff.)
- Simeon praises God (2:29ff.)

If they did not break out in actual musical song, then certainly the joyous song of the heart. Perhaps we should take a cue and measure our hearts this Christmas by that standard. Those who get what Christmas is about have a song in their heart. Is your heart singing?

We could wish the story ended here and we could all just leave on a happy note; a kind of Messianic baby shower. Cute baby. Lots of potential. Happy thoughts. Let's go home. But if you know anything about the fuller story, this salvation through this baby would be devastating.

*"And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. 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 (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed'"* (Luke 2:33-35).

Imagine Mary, marveling but wondering, what did Simeon mean, *a sword piercing my soul?* She wouldn't know for 33 years until she stood near Jesus as he hung dying on the cross. Makes you wonder if she thought as she looked at Jesus on the cross, *now I know what old Simeon meant.*

I want to draw our thoughts to one part of Simeon's prophecy, *"this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many"* (Luke 2:34). This is an interesting way to say it. We say the phrase the other way. The rise and fall. So many history books are written that way, *the rise and fall of Rome*. The rise and fall of the third Reich. I've been watching a biography series on Napoleon which is the rise and fall of Napoleon. Napoleon rose to Versailles. Napoleon fell at Waterloo. The great kingdoms of history rise and then they fall. I'm unaware of any books about anything or anyone that are entitled, *the Fall and the Rise*.

Did Simeon just get it wrong? In his excitement about holding the Messiah, perhaps he simply misspoke. He got it backwards. You and I do that all the time. Some of us get paid to do it regularly in front of a lot of people.

Yet Simeon says that this Jesus will be the cause of the fall and rise of many. What does that mean? This is a description of the spiritual effect Jesus will have on the world. "Fall and rise" is itself a description of the experience of anyone who comes under the grace of God in salvation. This is what separates true Christianity from all its counterfeits and all its rival religions. They are all about rising. Follow this leader and you will be a better person. Follow this teaching and you will be more spiritual. Join this religious group and your life will be better. Rise!

Christianity comes along, and it doesn't start with *rising*, it begins with *falling*. Falling as in conviction of sin and sinfulness before God. Falling as in realization of spiritual emptiness. Christianity doesn't begin by making us better, it begins by exposing us as the frauds we truly are. Jesus' life and teaching does this to this day. Read Jesus' life and teaching and we agree with Peter who said, "*Depart from me, for I am a sinful man*" (Luke 5:8). The gospel of Jesus takes us where we naturally don't want to go, *our need*. Our spiritual bankruptcy. Our unworthiness. It rubs our noses in all our sinful failures. When we understand the Christian message, we don't rise in our self-estimation, we fall. We fall to the point where we realize, I'm not great. I'm not good. The only thing I'm good at is sinning.

Falling. But this is precisely where we need to be to receive grace from God. To receive a gift. And that is what salvation is!

- "*Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations*" (Luke 24:46-47).
- "*I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance*" (Luke 5:32).
- "*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel*" (Mark 1:15).

When the crowds on the days of Pentecost who heard Peter's message about Jesus asked, *what shall we do?* Peter answered, *Repent*. (Acts 2:37-38) Repentance is key to falling so that we might rise. If you are a Christian today, it means that you fell. I remember as a boy having an intense sense of my guilt. I felt so dirty. It was part of what made me desire to believe in Jesus. Even as a boy, I wanted that sense of guilt taken away.

This is the first and necessary step. Jesus causes the falling of many. But this is only the first part. Simeon says, he will cause the falling *and the rising*. When we fall into an honest realization of our spiritual need for forgiveness, now the reality of Jesus as Savior for all people is wonderful news. Why? He is also the cause of *rising*. What is that?

I'm tempted to say, rising from the dead, but that's not his point. Rising is a summary of all the saving benefits that Jesus provides to us when we acknowledge our sin before God and trust in Jesus as our Savior. This baby in the temple grows up to be a man. The gospel tells us all about his life and miracles and teaching and loving example. But most importantly, Jesus was God in flesh who died on a Roman Cross as a substitute for the death our sins deserve. He was raised from the dead on the third day and proclaimed that all who repent of their sins and put their personal faith in him will be granted forgiveness of sins forever and blessed with the gift of eternal life.

Would you call that rising? Old Simeon had it right before anyone else realized who this baby was and the effect he would have on the world.

So, what does this mean for us today?

### **A reminder to the younger and an encouragement to the older**

While it doesn't tell us how old Simeon was, his prayer that he's now ready to die suggests he was an older man. We didn't talk about Anna in the following verses, but we know how old she was, 84. Most of those years a widow. It's noteworthy that the two people in all of Jerusalem who had spiritual insight here were elderly. Neither of them were considered cool or hip. Neither of them were next generation type leaders. Yet, they were the ones God chose to hold the Messiah and declare who he was.

Let's keep that in mind. We are a multi-generational church, and we live in a culture that idolizes youth. When you talk with an elderly saint, you may not realize who you are talking to.

It reminds me of years ago I went to breakfast with an old man in our church. Hunched over. Kind of shrinking. At breakfast, somehow it came up how he was a Marine in World War II. You know, the type who stormed the island beaches like Guadalcanal and Iwo Jima. Now he had my attention. I asked a foolish question. I was much younger and dumber then. I asked, *did you ever have to kill someone?* He pulled up his sleeve and showed me a scar on his arm. "Japanese bayonet," he said. I asked, "What happened to the other guy?" He said, "He's still there," in a tone that was meant to communicate, I can take you out with this butter knife any time I want.

I have had that discovery type experience over and over with the older saints in our church. The best stories are the spiritual ones as the testimony of faithful Christianity over decades is known. Let's show proper respect for the Simeons and Annas we are privileged to have walking around here at Bethel Church.

### **Fall and Rise – A picture of Christian salvation**

The main thing I want to ask you today is, have you fallen? Have you risen? The life and the teachings of Jesus are hard. Actually, impossible on our own. *Love God with all your heart? Love your neighbor as yourself?* These and all the other commands remind us of the truth, that we don't break the Ten Commandments; they break us. But from that place of brokenness, we see a morally perfect Savior dying on the cross, in our place, for our sins. From that cross and empty tomb, he offers salvation to every repenting sinner who trusts in him for forgiveness and eternal life. Have you fallen as a sinner? Have you risen as saint? Put your trust in him and rise forever with eternal life.

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