

Advent Series

VBC

Pastor John Johnson

Luke 2:32-35

December 26, 2004

It's the day after Christmas

- As Max Lucado put it, the clean up soon begins
 - The lights will come down, trees will go out
 - Size 36 will be exchanged for size 40
 - Eggnog will be half price, everything will be half price
 - Trash bills will get hit with extra can charges
 - December's generosity will become January's payments
 - And it's back to the "grind-em-up, eat-em-up world of staying alive in uncertain times"

But maybe we better make sure we got the message of yesterday right before we go forward

- For maybe we didn't

TM Moore, a writer for Breakpoint, got me to thinking about this with a recent article titled "The Jesus We Preach at Christmas"

- In it, he takes preachers to task for serving up Christmas sermons that reinforce false ideas about Jesus and Christmas
- And I asked myself, "Could that be me?"
- "Surely there is more to the message of Christmas than a seasonal dose of peace and good will, expressed in a veritable shark feed of gifts and giving"
- And he is right

It's the passage before us that helps remove the distortions, brings the clarity, helps complete the message of Christmas

- Read Luke 2:25-35
- Luke's story of Christmas does not end with Bethlehem
- Verses 1-20 cannot be understood apart from verses 21-40
- For a prophetic voice now puts it all together
 - That voice was Simeon
 - An old man, whose better days were behind him
 - A man we know little of except for this
 - He was sensitive to God, he lived with anticipation
 - He lived with the hope God would deliver
 - And God somewhere said, I will explain the meaning of Christmas through him
- What some might view as a mere hymn, or as some sort of inconsequential addendum, is in reality divine voice unwrapping mystery!

1) Jesus' COMING REPRESENTS SALVATION - verse 30

- And maybe that doesn't amaze us
 - We have become so accustomed to this word
 - We have reduced it to slogans, sprayed it on rocks, and lost the wonder of it
- But Simeon was filled with the wonder
- Declaring in his ravaged world, as well as ours "Behold, DELIVERANCE - Which You have prepared, as a feast!!"
 - Holding in his arms was the One who will bring our lives out of despair
 - Out of the mess of our own making
 - Out of bondage to sinful habits
 - There have been lots of false messiahs, but here is finally the One who alone can, will save us from ourselves
 - Save us from the Evil One who loves to hold us in his clutches
 - Save us from the world that seeks to conform us to its values
 - Behold, the One who will save us from misuse, disuse, and abuse

2) Jesus' COMING REPRESENTS THE LONG AWAITED LIGHT - verse 32

- In a world enveloped by spiritual darkness, under the domain of darkness, He is the One who will finally dispel the night (verse 32)
- He will enable people, no matter their background, to no longer stub their toes, walk into walls, fall into pits
 - Drift aimlessly in the blackness with no compass
- In all of this, Simeon saw the long awaited glory
- But Simeon also saw something else
 - Something most Christmas cards leave off
 - Most Christmas messages leave out

3) Jesus' COMING REPRESENTS A GREAT DIVIDE

- One imagines Simeon's brow intensifying
- His voice taking on a different tone
 - It shudders and it cracks
- Jesus is good news, He is also bad news
 - Verses 34-35 have an almost ominous sound to them
 - God has destined, made it His design, that Jesus will powerfully impact lives for good or bad

A) Jesus will cause some to rise, others to fall

- Men will either ascend to new life or live with Him in the heavenlies
- Or fall, stumble, come to ruin

- B) Jesus will bring salvation, rejecting Him will bring eternal ruin
- C) Jesus will unify, He will divide
- "Do you think I have come to bring peace? No, rather, division - father against son, mother against daughter" Luke 12:49f
 - Humanity will be divided along lines of faith
- D) He will demand absolute allegiance
- You cannot serve money and me (Luke 18:23)
 - If you are determined to find your security and happiness in the accumulation of things, than resolve to leave off following Christ, for you cannot serve two masters
 - We may deceive ourselves into thinking we can
 - We can invest our best energies and affections in the things of this world, and also give our lives to Jesus
 - But this is a lie, we really are not following Christ
- E) He will define truth, He will expose lies
- There will be no toleration of other ways, other truth claims
 - "I am the way, the truth, the life"
- F) He will bring peace, He will bring a sword
- Jesus, by His very nature, by His very ministry, will smoke out our true intents
 - No longer will men be able to hide
 - Religious leaders who have long impressed with their flowing robes and meticulous law keeping, and lengthy prayers, and public fasting, will be exposed for the hypocrites they are - the side they are on
 - Political leaders who assume they control the destiny of men will be exposed for who they are
 - The Pilates and Herods of this world are nothing but frail creatures who can only carry out what God allows
 - Those marginalized by the world, assumed to be nobodies, the dregs of the world, will be uncovered as often those God especially favors
 - The adversary, working behind the scenes, will be exposed, the demons will cry out in fear
- G) He will be loved, He will be hated
- H) His coming will set in motion God's plan to redeem
- As well as set in motion Satan's enmity towards God, towards man

- l) He will come to bring God's kingdom
- As well as destroy the works of the devil
 - Hence, the swaddled infant will goad wickedness to violence, excite the machines of terror
 - The kingdom of Rome will be enlisted to devour
 - The adversary will raise up a nation to crucify Jesus
 - Stowell: "Jesus' birth was a shot heard from the throne room of God to the darkest dens of the subterranean halls of hell. It launched hell's most frantic assault."
 - As the heavens burst with a blaze of the angelic presence, the doors of darkness opened, and the evil forces of night moved across the landscape like an impending fog
 - The light of the world exposed the darkness, and the darkness was bent upon extinguishing it
 - And like a sword, it will pierce Mary's soul

How much of this Simeon saw, we do not know

- But he saw something we must see
 - Jesus is the most consequential being on this earth
 - Men and women will have to decide
 - You can't be neutral, you can't be vague, you can't be wishy washy
 - He will draw lines in the sand, He will call for decision
 - HE WILL REVEAL HEARTS
 - A war of cosmic proportions, a battle for the hearts and souls of people has been set in motion
 - And what you do with Jesus will have everything to do with whether your life rises or falls
 - Heads north, or goes south

Luke 2:22f is a divine reminder that, for all of our sentimentalizing and romanticizing of Christmas

- It is not the true meaning of Christmas
- It is nothing less than a call for decision

This is who Jesus is - He lays the hearts of all of us bare

- Get close to Jesus, and He will expose the state of your soul
 - The refuse in your heart
- He will check your ambitions to discern if they are holy or unholy
- He will uncover the impurities; disclose your resentments and angers
- The crowds will follow for a while (as they did), but then they will strike the stone
 - In the midst of their search for a meal ticket, a healing agent, He will make it clear that He is in search of a militant army, not a milquetoast audience
- A lifelong commitment, not a short term contract