

Why Jesus? We Need a Reconciler

Luke 2:22-35

Good morning, I'm Michael Tourtellotte, one of the pastors here, and this morning we'll be looking at Luke 2:22-35, which you can find on page 805 in one of the pew Bibles in front of you. For the last few weeks, we have been in our Advent series in which we have been asking the question, "Why Jesus?" As in, why is Jesus such a big deal? Why does He matter? Why do we say He is the Savior of the world, and that apart from Him no one can be restored to right relationship with God? And we've answered that question in two ways, so far.

First, why Jesus? Because we need a King. Pastor Stan showed us that one of the ways the Bible depicts the plight of the human condition is by describing humanity as a part of the kingdom of darkness of which Satan as the king. And so, salvation is being removed from the kingdom of darkness, and transferred to the kingdom of light of which Jesus as the King. So, why Jesus? Because we needed a King who would establish a Kingdom of blessing and goodness, in which we could live with Him and thrive as He intended us to.

Second, why Jesus? Because we need a Savior. Pastor Grant reminded us that another way the Bible depicts the human condition is with the idea of exile or lostness. And so, salvation is being found, brought back from exile into the presence of God. So, why Jesus? We needed a Savior to come find us and lead us back to God.

This week, we ask again, "Why Jesus?" And the answer is, "We need a Reconciler." Because, you see, there is a reason humanity was consigned to the kingdom of darkness, a reason we were exiled from the presence of God to wander in the wilderness. And that reason is that we caused a rift in our relationship with our Creator. We decided to spurn His ways, and in so doing spurned relationship with Him.

The God of the Bible is not an impersonal God, but a personal God. He is a God who wants to relate to His image-bearers, as He did with Adam and Eve, walking with them in the Garden before things went wrong. This is a God who loves, and therefore, a God who can be hurt, and we hurt Him. However, unlike in other relationships, when your relationship with God is fractured, your relationship to goodness is fractured, and this is what the kingdom of darkness and the wilderness are. God is the source of all goodness, all blessing, all life, and so when you cut yourself off from Him, you cut yourself off from those things as well.

So, another way of viewing the plight of humanity is through the lens of relationship: our relationship with God is broken, and this is why we are citizens of darkness, and exiles in the wilderness. When you cut yourself off from the Source of light, you are left with darkness. When you cut yourself off from the Source of life, you are left with what Psalm 107:40 calls the "trackless wastes". Therefore, we need a Reconciler to deal with the relational problem, to heal our broken relationship with God. And in our passage this morning, we will see that that is what Jesus came to do.

Luke 2:22-24 reads, "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.'"

In these verses, Jesus, even as a child, identifies with sinful humanity. There are two separate ceremonies taking place in these verses. First, the purification required of a mother after giving birth. And second, the dedication of a firstborn son.

When a Jewish mother gave birth to a son, she was considered unclean for a total of 40 days. After the 40 days, she was required to make a purification sacrifice of a lamb for a burnt offering and a pigeon or a turtledove for a sin offering, or, if the mother was poorer, she could offer two of the specified birds for the offerings. What's interesting in this passage though, is that Luke says, "And when the time came for *their* purification..." This is interesting, because the Law of Moses only considered the mother to be unclean, not the child or the husband, and so only the mother needed purification. It is possible that either Jesus or Joseph contracted ceremonial uncleanness somehow, and so needed to be

purified as well, except that the text only mentions one offering being made: the offering for the purification of the mother, so I think something else is going on here.

I think Luke is making the point that Jesus came, as I said, to identify with sinful humanity, and to take our impurity onto Himself in order to make us truly clean. Romans 8:3 puts it this way, "For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending His own Son *in the likeness of sinful flesh* and for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh..." This verse is exposing the irony that the religious rituals of 1st century Judaism (and all other religious rituals that purport to cleanse from sin for that matter) is that they did not actually deal with the uncleanness of the sinful human condition. So, Jesus came to do what the law could not. Which meant that He had to take our sin and impurity on Himself, even though He Himself was not sinful, nor impure. In the words of 2 Corinthians 5:21, "For our sake He [God] made Him [Jesus] to be sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God." This is the divine exchange of the Gospel: Christ takes our sin, and we get His righteousness. And the language around the second ceremony in these verses alludes to the purpose of God to make that exchange possible.

As the text says, the Law specified that firstborn sons were to be set apart for the Lord. This command is rooted in the Exodus narrative, coming directly after the 10th plague against Egypt, in which God killed the firstborns of Egypt, but preserved the firstborns of Israel. God makes it clear that because He preserved the Israelite firstborns, they now owe Him a life debt; their lives now belong to Him, and they are to be set apart for Him.

However, instead of making all Israelite parents give up their firstborn sons, God required two things as an alternative. First, He claimed the Levites as His own in place of the firstborns of the other tribes, and so the Levites were set apart to serve God with the priests. And second, God required parents to pay a 5-shekel redemption price for each firstborn son to make up the difference between the male Levites and the firstborn sons of the other 11 tribes of Israel which outnumbered them.

But this brings us to another interesting aspect of our passage. Namely that there is no mention of Joseph and Mary paying the redemption price for Jesus, who is not a Levite, and yet the text says they came to Jerusalem specifically to "present Him to the Lord". Some scholars simply assume they paid the redemption price, but I tend to think that's an underappreciation of how intentional the biblical authors are in what they write.

You see, scholars also note that this presentation of Jesus is reminiscent of the story of Samuel. Samuel was also born to a mother previously thought unable to have children, albeit due to barrenness in Hannah's case, as opposed to virginity in Mary's. And there is also no mention of a redemption price being paid for Samuel by his parents in the story of his birth either. Instead, once he is weaned, Hannah takes him to the Tabernacle at Shiloh, and "presents" him to the Lord, leaving him there to serve with the priests. Now, Samuel was a Levite, but the story of his birth and presentation to God does not actually mention this, you have to go to Chronicles to figure that out. So, another possibly intentional omission to make Samuel's story a foreshadowing of Jesus's dedication.

Now, Jesus, as I said, is not a Levite by birth, and so He would not have been permitted to serve in the Temple, but He nonetheless goes on to serve in a Levitical function. Just as the lives of the Levites were given to God to take the place of the lives of Israel's firstborns, so Jesus's life would be given to God, both by dedication and eventually by sacrifice, to redeem the lives of all people. So, whether or not Joseph and Mary made the redemption payment for Jesus, I think Luke omits that detail in order to clue us into the fact that Jesus *is* the redemption payment. This is the salvation that faithful Jews had been waiting for, as we see in verses 25 and 26. "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."

Simeon makes up one part of a pair of characters in the passage who represent faithful Israel. Simeon representing the men, and Anna, who we will hear about next week, represents the women, both of whom are eagerly awaiting the Redeemer promised by God. We do not know anything else about Simeon, other than what we read here.

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He was simply a righteous and devout man. However, he had a unique relationship with God. The text says that “the Holy Spirit was upon him” (which is rare at this point in the biblical story), and that it had been revealed to him that he would see the Messiah before he died.

We’re also told that he was waiting for the “consolation of Israel”. This word “consolation” speaks of comforting, so it could be translated “the comforting of Israel”. This harkens back to passages like Isaiah 40:1, which we read during our Advent time, in which God promises there will be a day when Israel’s punishment for their sins is complete, and their relationship with God is restored.

Remember what I said earlier, why does Israel need a Savior and a Redeemer in the first place? Because they had broken their relationship with God. They had violated their covenant with Him, and so they needed someone to come and reconcile them to God. So, Simeon was waiting for a Savior who would be a Reconciler between God and His people, and so bring Israel comfort.

But what’s the connection between reconciliation and comfort? Well, if you have ever been in conflict with a loved one, you know that such a situation is agonizing, full of tension and *discomfort*. And if you have been blessed to experience reconciliation after such a conflict, what accompanies the reconciliation? Comfort, relief, relational resolution. Right? This is what Simeon is waiting for. And in verses 27-32 he finds out his wait is over.

“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.’”

First, pay attention to verse 27, which is so unassuming that it is easy to miss its *massive* significance. Nearly 600 years prior to this, Ezekiel had a vision in which the presence of the Lord departed from the Temple, leaving it spiritually barren. So, what we just read in verse 27 describes God returning to the Temple for the first time in 600 years, not as a cloud of glory, as He did when Solomon dedicated the first Temple, but as a tiny, human baby. And the reception He receives from His people could not be more different than when Solomon dedicated the first Temple, which speaks to the state of Israel in Jesus’ day.

When Solomon dedicated the first Temple the whole congregation of Israel was there, sacrificing so many animals that they could not be counted, and blessing the Lord for fulfilling His promises to His people. Now there are only two people who even recognize what is happening. But they too, beginning here with Simeon, bless the Lord for fulfilling His promises.

Simeon worships God for fulfilling His personal promise to Simeon, His promise of salvation to Israel, and His promise of salvation to the Gentiles. It is remarkable that a Jewish man would speak of the Gentiles in such a moment. But Simeon knows that God’s salvation goes beyond Israel. Last week Pastor Grant defined salvation in terms of Jesus bringing us out of exile, and back into fellowship with God. He reminded us that there are a number of exiles, and restorations in the Old Testament. The most recent being the Babylonian exile, and before that the Egyptian exile, but there was one he mentioned that preceded even that: the exile from Eden. Which was the ultimate, most widespread exile: the exile of the whole human race, Jews and Gentiles, from the presence of God.

It is not just Israel who violated their covenant with God. In our first father and mother, Adam and Eve, all of humanity broke covenant with God, fracturing our relationship with Him, and therefore, all of humanity needs a reconciler. So, by the Spirit, Simeon recognizes Jesus is not just the salvation of Israel, but of all peoples. Jesus is God come to mankind, as a man, to bring all mankind back into relationship with God. And so, Jesus is a light revealing God to the Gentiles, and a light of glory for God’s people Israel, who are privileged to have the Messiah come from their nation. It’s incredibly good news, and yet, in verses 33-35 Simeon makes clear that this reconciliation will not be received by all and will be costly. “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.'"

Following his praise of God for sending the Reconciler, Simeon essentially describes the ministry Jesus would go on to have. The claim that He would cause many to "fall and rise" could be taken a couple ways. Simeon could mean Jesus will cause some to fall by rejecting Him, and others to be raised up by accepting Him. Or he could mean that individuals will need to be humbled in order to be exalted, they will fall before rising. The reality is that Jesus does both.

First, part of what made Jesus so offensive to the religious and secular rulers of His day, and so attractive to the crowds is that He upended the system that gave the rulers power and influence, at the expense of the masses. For instance, the scribes and Pharisees enjoyed tremendous honor in Jewish society, because they were the righteous ones, and therefore, superior to sinners. So, it was problematic for Jesus to say things to a mixed crowd like, "Your righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees", because that implied the scribes and Pharisees were on the same level as everyone else ultimately; Jesus leveled the field, causing some to fall and others to be raised up.

Second, the call of Jesus to every individual is and was a call to fall, so that they might rise. "...whoever loses his life for my sake will find it," He said. The Gospel is a call to death, and then resurrection; a call to fall, before rising. This is what Jesus would do in His earthly ministry, and it would be "a sign opposed".

A sign biblically was something or someone that pointed to the work God was doing, and Jesus was certainly a sign that a new era of God's work had begun; that's the whole point of Jesus' message that the Kingdom was at hand. Of course, such a sign should be celebrated, right? Anytime God is doing a new salvific work people should be excited. But Simeon tells Joseph and Mary that this sign would face opposition. And once again, this is a fitting description of how Jesus would be received, or rather, not received. Largely tied to the fact that His ministry would cause the fall of certain people, and, in fact, the fall of an entire religious system, opposition was a constant for Jesus. Throughout His earthly ministry Jesus would be opposed, even to the point of being murdered. And this opposition would have its effect on Mary, her soul would be pierced.

Once again, there may be a double meaning going on here. First, Jesus would reveal the thoughts of many hearts in His ministry, and Mary would not be exempt from that experience, being a sinner in need of grace herself. But second, as His mother, doubtless her heart would be pierced by the opposition He faced throughout His life, and certainly by His brutal, unjust death. So, Simeon begins by praising God for the coming of the Reconciler, but then makes it clear that reconciliation would be difficult and costly to achieve.

But that difficulty was the path to the reconciliation. Jesus did not just cause others to fall and rise, but fell Himself, was brought low to earth, in order that we might be raised to heaven. Jesus was unjustly opposed by sinners, so that we might be accepted by the Father. Jesus came to identify with us, to take on what we deserved, so that He could reconcile us to God. Humanity had broken their relationship with God, so Jesus became a part of humanity in order to bear the consequences of that broken relationship for us, that we might be reconciled. So, why Jesus? Because we need a reconciler to restore our relationship with God.

If you've ever been through a reconciliation process, you know that a big part of it is the two sides coming to understand one another empathetically. So often, people at odds don't have a deep appreciation for the other person's side of things, and this is what creates an impasse. Often, the person at fault has difficulty understanding just how deeply he or she has hurt the other person. Conversely, often the person who has been hurt has difficulty understanding what could have caused the other person to be so hurtful. And until that understanding gap is closed, reconciliation does not happen.

With this in mind, can you see why Jesus is the necessary Reconciler between man and God? Jesus is God with a full appreciation of the pain man's sin has caused the Creator. And Jesus is a man with a full appreciation of the

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weakness, fears, and temptations that conspire to push men toward sin. Only Jesus understands both sides of the broken relationship between man and God.

For true reconciliation, the pain of the offense must be acknowledged, understood, borne, and repented of without excuse by the offender, and forgiveness must be freely given by the offended. Jesus, knowing God's pain, came as a man to acknowledge, understand, and bear the pain and grief mankind had caused God. Because we have not just broken God's law, we have broken His heart. We often speak of God's wrath being poured out on Jesus on the cross, but it was more than just His wrath, it was His grief and pain as well. Isaiah 53:5 says, "...upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace..." Chastisement is being told exactly what you have done wrong, and to what extent. Jesus bore our chastisement for us.

Because Jesus, experiencing humanity's weakness, knew that no one apart from Him would ever be able to face up to that chastisement that repentance required. C.S. Lewis profoundly summarizes the problem in *Mere Christianity* writing, "Only a bad person needs to repent: only a good person can repent perfectly. The worse you are the more you need it and the less you can do it. The only person who could do it perfectly would be a perfect person – and he would not need it."

He also explains, "...this repentance...is not something God demands of you before He will take you back and which He could let you off if He chose: *it is simply a description of what going back to Him looks like.*" So, to put it another way, why Jesus? Because imperfect humanity needed to return to God, but only a perfect man could make the trip.

If you are sitting here this morning thinking, "I could never face up to the pain my sin has caused God. I could never fix my relationship with Him. I've hurt Him too much, and I'm too weak and afraid to face it." You are right. You have pained God in ways you cannot imagine, and in your current, sinful condition you will never be able to face Him and bear His just chastisement.

That is why you need Jesus. He faced God for you. He bore the chastisement for you. He came and identified with sinful humanity, in order to do what the law, weakened by human flesh could not. He came to bring us back to God by bearing not just the wrath of God, but His grief as well. He became sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God. He was chastised, that we who offended might have peace with God. He was opposed, that we who rebelled might be accepted. He was forsaken, that we prodigals might be welcomed back home.

If you are here today knowing that your relationship with God is not right, I have good news for you: Jesus came as the Reconciler. And so, your relationship with God can be repaired today. Jesus took God's grief and pain, so you could experience God's comfort and peace. So, I invite you, here and now, to come home to your Father, who, because of Jesus, is eagerly awaiting your return.

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“Why Jesus? We Need a Reconciler”

Luke 2:22-35

Main Idea: Jesus came as the Reconciler to restore our relationship with God.

Introduction – The Underlying Problem

Luke 2:22-24 – The Redemption Payment

Luke 2:25-26 – Awaiting the Consolation of Israel

Luke 2:27-32 – God Returns to His Temple

Luke 2:33-35 – The Ministry of Reconciliation

Conclusion – Jesus and the Problem with Repentance

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Main Idea: Jesus came as the Reconciler to restore our relationship with God.

- 1) Does viewing your sin and the Gospel through the lens of broken and restored relationship with God enhance your understanding in any way? How so?
- 2) What do you think this aspect of the Gospel means for our human relationship?
- 3) Read 2 Corinthians 5:16-21. In light of Jesus’s work as Reconciler, what do you think it looks like to carry out “the ministry of reconciliation”.