

Christmas Gives Revelation

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Preacher: Jonathan de Groot

[0 : 00] Well, the question is, has Christmas been cancelled? Has Christmas been cancelled? I actually don't know if Christmas has been cancelled. There are so many different messages, and I guess over these past weeks, that has been the question.

Will Christmas be cancelled? Will our politicians manage to save Christmas for us? And the thinking is that if they are able to allow us to have as normal a Christmas as possible, with our family, as we'd like to do, then the thinking would be Christmas is saved.

But if we're not able to be with our family at Christmas, then Christmas, the thinking is, is ruined.

And so all of the confusing and contradictory messages that come to us have implied that if Christmas is saved, then many lives will be lost, which is kind of ironic, isn't it?

That Christmas would mean the loss of life. And we got an answer of sorts, I guess, yesterday. And yet, when it comes to Christmas, the fact is that we can't save Christmas.

We can't save Christmas. But the good news is that Christmas is what saves us. Christmas saves us. And that is the fantastic message of Christianity, at Christmas time and at any time.

[1 : 24] And so rather than being confused and contradictory, the message of Christianity is very clear. The message of Christmas is crystal clear. And that is that Christmas doesn't cost lives.

The reality is that Christmas saves lives. Jesus came to save. I wonder if you caught that in our last Bible reading from Luke chapter 2.

It comes as part of Simeon's song, where Simeon, as he held the baby Jesus in his arms, said, For my eyes have seen your salvation.

Now, Simeon's song is known in Latin as the *nunc dimittis*, meaning now dismiss. Because Simeon was ready to die now that he had seen God's salvation.

He had seen the child, the baby Jesus, who would save. And so Simeon's song is part of a Christmas playlist that Luke records for us.

[2 : 23] Luke is the author of this account of Jesus' life. And he narrates the birth of Jesus with a number of songs. And they are the original and they are the best Christmas songs.

Because they declare for us the true message of Christmas. And so what we see from Simeon's words are that Christmas reveals God's salvation.

I'll explain that in a moment. Because we're being told that Jesus came to bring God's salvation to you, to me. Therefore, the crucial question that helps us make sense of Christmas today is, Well, what is my response to God's gift to me?

Because Simeon's words also tell us that Christmas reveals our hearts. That's an interesting thing, isn't it? Christmas reveals our hearts. And so I'd like those two simple points to be our focus this afternoon.

First of all, Christmas reveals God's salvation. What God has done. Secondly, Christmas reveals our hearts. What our response should be.

[3 : 31] Christmas reveals God's salvation. And Christmas reveals our hearts. So first of all, Christmas reveals God's salvation. And we see this in Simeon's song. So why did Simeon sing it?

Well, the context is that Mary and Joseph, after the birth of Jesus, took Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem to present him, which is what he had to do according to the law.

Present him to the Lord. And that's where Simeon comes in. Because Simeon, of course, is not one of the better known characters in the Christmas story. I guess you could say that he's got more of a supporting role.

But we can't miss what Simeon says about God's salvation. Because usually when we're thinking about Christmas, we think with warm, cozy, sentimental feelings.

And the nice Christmas story fits into all the nostalgia. But Simeon is talking about salvation. A big word, word in the Bible, salvation.

[4 : 30] But it's a word that describes that we are in danger and we need to be saved. And so whatever else we think or feel at Christmas, no matter how warm, cozy and fuzzy the feelings are, Christmas is fundamentally a rescue mission.

So we are people who need to be saved. And so if we fail to take hold of the salvation that God offers to us, then the message of the Bible says that we're lost forever.

And so let's not miss this amongst all the trees, the tinsel, the toys, the traditions and the turkey. Because what we read here is that Simeon, a man who was righteous and devout, was waiting for the consolation of Israel.

In other words, Simeon was waiting for God to deliver his people. He was longing for the salvation that God had promised. Because Simeon knew that our world, this world, isn't right.

And we know this world isn't right. It is full of sickness, viruses, sadness, suffering, pain, misery, tears and death. And yet Simeon knew the scriptures promised great hope for the future.

[5 : 48] And he knew that this world is not right because we, as people, are not right with God. And yet Simeon also knew that God had promised to fix this.

That's where the hope and the joy comes in at Christmas. Because centuries before, God had promised that his salvation would come. That he himself would come to save.

And so Simeon had waited his whole life for God to console this hurting and broken world. He had this longing deep inside him that is also deep inside all of us to see this world put right.

And so the Holy Spirit had revealed to Simeon that he wouldn't die until he had seen God's Messiah. The one who would bring this salvation. And so when the family were in the temple, Simeon was moved by the Holy Spirit to perceive this child's identity.

The child that Mary and Joseph were holding. And so he took Jesus in his arms and he said, this is from a reading. Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace.

[7 : 05] For my eyes have seen your salvation. So Simeon had seen God's salvation with his own eyes. It had come and it was lying in his arms in the baby Jesus.

And so now that God had revealed his salvation, Simeon was ready to die. He had seen all that he needed to see in life. And so it was time for him to go.

Now there's a New York Times bestseller called 1000 Places to See Before You Die. I know this because a friend got me the calendar, 1000 Places to See Before You Die for Christmas.

I don't know what they were trying to say to me about what 2021 held in store for me. But anyway, I'll use the calendar on my desk. But basically from trekking through Mount Kenya National Park to admiring the colonial architecture of Havana's old quarter to visiting the Grand Canyon or the Great Barrier Reef, the book outlines the things that you must do before you die.

But Simeon had just one thing on his list, just one, to see God's salvation. And he had seen it in this baby, the baby Jesus, in his arms.

[8 : 21] Because Jesus was the one to accomplish God's salvation. And that's why Simeon continues to sing. He sings, For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of your people Israel.

And so Simeon is singing about salvation, which is for all people. And that includes you and me. So Jesus didn't just come to reveal God's salvation to the people of Israel, known as God's people.

But he came to the Gentiles, which is everybody else, including you and me. And so Simeon's saying to see Jesus is to see God's salvation, God's light, God's revelation, God's glory can all be seen in this tiny baby who grew up to be a man, lived, died and rose again.

And so that means that there is no salvation without Jesus Christ. So no matter what our religion or our country or our background, whether we see ourselves as being spiritual or secular, a seeker or a sceptic, Christmas reveals to us that Jesus is the only hope for all of our lives.

But you might be asking, well, why do I need salvation? What do I need to be saved from? Well, the Bible speaks about our need to be saved from sin.

[10 : 04] And sin is like a deadly disease that infects us all. And we don't catch it like you might catch the coronavirus. We're born with it. It is part of our human nature.

And the symptoms of this sickness, this deadly sickness called sin, are seen in how we live our lives. They're seen in our relationships with other people and the things we say and the things that

we do.

And the symptoms of sin are seen most of all in the way we treat the God who made us. So human sin is the root cause of everything that's wrong with our world.

And it's serious because it separates us from the pure and perfect and righteous and holy God. Because that's what he is like and we know that's not what we are like.

I guess for all of us, one of the most difficult things of 2020 has been the separation from loved ones. Because we long to be with the people we love.

[11 : 09] We long to give them a hug or an embrace. Just it's a normal thing to do. And yet what is far more devastating is being socially distanced from God.

And yet that's what sin does. It is more lethal than the coronavirus because it prevents us from being in God's presence forever. Which is what the Bible calls hell.

And yet the wonderful news of Christmas is that God has come to us in order to save us. He has revealed his salvation, his method of saving us in Jesus.

And so how do we receive it? Well, Simeon's closing words to Mary give the clue. Because Simeon's talking about the future and what lies in store for this baby that he's holding in his arms.

And so as he held Jesus, he looked at Mary in the eye and he said, last line, A sword will pierce your own soul too. He was saying that this child would be the cause of much pain and much sorrow for Mary.

[12 : 20] And the deepest sorrow for Mary being that she would watch her child die on a cross. So God's salvation would come, but it would come at great personal cost to Mary.

But it would come at even greater personal cost to Jesus who would willingly give up his life to die for sin on a cross. And so even from the very earliest of days, the shadow of the cross fell over Jesus Christ.

Because that's how he would accomplish God's mission and thereby offer God's salvation to us. Let me just try and illustrate. One of the most moving stories for me of recent years was the cave rescue of the junior football team in Thailand.

When the 12 boys and their coach spent 18 days inside a cave after being trapped by monsoon floodwaters. You would have seen it on the news.

And it was a dangerous rescue involving teams of Navy SEALs and cave diving experts. And there was no way possible that those boys could save themselves.

[13 : 34] And they were going to die in that cave. The only way they could be rescued was if rescue and help and salvation could come from the outside to them on the inside.

And it did. Because rescuers willingly risked their own lives in order to save these boys. And amazingly, every single one of those boys and their coach was rescued as the world watched on TV.

It was fantastic. And yet sadly, one ex-Navy SEAL, a man called Saman Kunan, died in the final phase of the rescue operation.

And he was hailed a hero as he ended up sacrificing his life to save others. And that's why Jesus came into this world.

We can't save ourselves. We are trapped by our sin. We're facing the flood water of God's judgment for it, followed by an eternity in isolation away from God.

[14 : 41] And yet God came in the form of a man in Jesus from the outside to us in our desperate situation in order to save us.

Jesus faced God's punishment for our sin on the cross so that we never have to. And so I wonder what your response is to this great news.

Because it's the good news of Christmas. So Christmas reveals God's salvation to us. That's one thing. But the second thing is Christmas reveals our hearts.

Listen to what else Simeon told Mary. Verse 33. The 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. So while salvation is revealed to all people, it doesn't mean that everyone will receive it.

[15 : 41] So Simeon here makes it clear that Jesus divides people. He's the cause of many people falling and rising. He is a sign that is spoken against.

And so right from his birth, throughout his life, people stood in bitter opposition to Jesus. They despised him and they tried to kill him. And so what Simeon is saying is true.

Some people will be for Jesus. Some will be against him. Some will accept him while others will reject him. And people have always been divided in their response to Jesus Christ. Because his coming causes great disturbance in our world, but also disturbance in our hearts. And so we can't sit on the fence when it comes to Jesus. That's why our response to Jesus ultimately reveals our hearts, the state of our hearts, before God. It exposes our true self.

[16:49] In a sense, Jesus is the litmus test, as it were. Revealing where we stand in relation to God's salvation.

Whether we have received it or just rejected it. It proves whether we've really grasped our need of it. And the answer to the question, have we received it, will be in our personal response to Jesus. So in my heart, am I aware of the problem of my sin and how much of an offense it is against the God who made me?

And so am I trusting in Jesus as my Savior. Because in revealing his salvation, God is calling us to stop our own attempts at our self-salvation.

And to receive his. Because basically, all of us, every human being is trying to save themselves. So the life we choose for ourselves is our self-salvation project.

[17:52] We think that the things we do will get us the joy, the peace, the satisfaction that we crave in life. And so, in a sense, we see ourselves as the Savior.

And we believe that all our efforts will achieve our salvation for us. And so, with our own strength, we think we'll get the power or the peace or the purpose that we long for.

And yet, everything we try in life will ultimately fail us. Whether it be a job or a relationship, money, position, or whatever. It will never give us the security that we long for.

And it will never satisfy our deepest desires. Even the great hope of a vaccine will be good for a while. But the salvation God offers is far deeper and more long-lasting.

So everything will fail us in life. And some things will even punish us when we fail. If we're looking to our job, our position, our career for our salvation, what happens when we lose it?

[19:01] It will punish us. And we'll struggle to cope. And yet, in Jesus Christ, we have the only Savior who not only gives us what we need, but he forgives us when we fail.

Because Christianity tells us that we are not saved by our own efforts, but by Jesus' efforts for us. We are not saved by our own performance, but by Jesus' performance on our behalf.

And that's why God's salvation is a gift for us to be received by us. And so the wonder of Christmas is that God has not stayed socially distant from us.

God has made his own Christmas bubble, if you like. And he wants to welcome us into it, to be with him, and to be with him for all eternity.

And his Christmas bubble is not restricted to a few households. It's not restricted to a particular people. It's not even restricted to a certain kind of person. God's gracious offer comes to all of us so that we can be saved, whoever we are and whatever we've done.

[20:18] So on that first Christmas, Jesus came to us. And now we must decide whether we will receive him. And just as Simeon was moved by the Holy Spirit to go and find Jesus, and then take him in the temple so long ago, we still have the opportunity to take Jesus today.

So the question is, have you done that yet? Because what we do with Jesus reveals the true state of our hearts before God.

And so there is no better time than now, this Christmas. Don't let this Christmas pass you by without receiving the salvation that God wants to give to you.

Jesus is the saviour of the world. And so is he your saviour? Amen.