

God's Sacrificial Gift

Luke 2:25-35

25 And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. 26 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. 27 So he came by 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, 28 he took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said:

29 "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, According to Your word; 30 For my eyes have seen Your salvation 31 Which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, 32 A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, And the glory of Your people Israel."

33 And Joseph and His mother marveled at those things which were spoken of Him. 34 Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against 35 (yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." NKJV

This portion of Scripture comes 40 days after Jesus is born. According to Lev 12:1-8 the mother of a male child must offer a sacrifice for her purification 40 days after the birth. So it is that they have come to the temple to offer a pair of turtle doves in keeping with the law.

As they are there, they are confronted by two very old people, a man and a woman, not related except in the promise of seeing the coming Messiah before their death. And although their messages are for the most part full of praise and joy, yet in the word from Simeon is a forward look at the sufferings of this babe that Mary and Joseph have brought with them. This precious gift that God has given them will also bring them sorrow for He is to be the Sacrifice that brings to humans the greatest benefit, eternal life.

- I. It was a planned sacrifice.
 - A. It is told that in the First World War there was a young French soldier who was seriously wounded. His arm was so badly smashed that it had to be amputated. He was a magnificent specimen of young manhood, and the surgeon was grieved that he must go through life maimed. So he waited beside his bedside to tell him the bad news when he recovered consciousness. When the lad's eyes opened, the surgeon said to him: "I am sorry to tell you that you have lost your arm." "Sir," said the lad, "I did not lose it; I gave it--for France." Jesus was not helplessly caught up in a mesh of circumstances from which he could not break free. Apart from any divine power he might have called in, it is quite clear that to the end he could have turned back and saved his life. He did not lose his life; he gave it. The Cross was not thrust upon him; he willingly accepted it--for

us. (William Barclay, Gospel of John)

- B. Jesus coming was designed to end in a sacrifice since the very beginning.
 - 1. Gen 3:15 And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel."
 - 2. In that little verse begins the prophecies that the Messiah would be bruised and would bleed and die, but that God would bring victory.
- II. It was a costly sacrifice.
- A. Every gift cost something.
 - B. But the Christmas Gift that God gave was His only begotten Son.
 - C. A rich man was down at the water front awaiting the departure of an ocean liner. He was joined by an acquaintance, who said to him, "You seem to be much pleased about something." "Yes," said the rich man, "I do feel unusually good today. Do you see that vessel at anchor in the North River? Well, I have on that vessel ten thousand dollars worth of equipment for a hospital in China, and I just came down to see the vessel safely off." "Well, that is interesting, and I am glad you made that gift," said the friend. "But you know I also have a gift on that ship. My only daughter is on that vessel, going to China to give her life as a missionary." The wealthy man looked touchingly into the eyes of his friend and exclaimed, "My dear brother, I feel as though I have given nothing as I think of what this sacrifice means to you!"
 - D. What a shame that for many the gift goes un-opened.
 - E. For others it is enjoyed for a time and then set aside for more "fun" items.
 - F. But for some, the gift lasts a lifetime, always refreshing and bringing light to their souls and peace to their hearts.
- III. It was a sacrifice of love.
- A. 1Jo 4:10 Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.
 - B. John 3:16 is the best Christmas verse in the Bible.
 - C. Have you noticed anything missing from today's "love"? What about sacrifice? Lottie Moon was converted to the claims of Christ on December 22, 1858. She then renounced her aristocratic background and served as a missionary in China for nearly five decades. Her sacrificial love can be summed up in this one quote: "If I had a thousand lives, I would give them all for the women of China." Today, the ingredient of sacrifice has almost disappeared from the recipe for love. Most today are involved in looking

for what they can get rather than what they should give up. Meanwhile, the other 50% has become slightly acquainted with self-denial. Yet, so often when they become sacrificial and it isn't fully appreciated or even recognized, they spoil the gift with their negative reaction. Christmas is a time to reacquaint ourselves with perfect love--faithful love that expects nothing in return. Speaking of the birth of Christ, the Bible says: "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 4:10 NIV). --Timeless Reflections P.O. Box 700, FB, GA 30542

- IV. It was a sacrifice of great proportion.
- A. His was no token of His love, it was full and complete.
 - B. His love gift testified to His willingness to bring us to Himself that we might enjoy Him forever.
 - C. It was not the down payment for our spiritual life, but a gift that covered it all.
 - D. An Irish Catholic man lay near the gates of death. A Bible, given him by a colporteur, had been read by stealth, and the Gospel by its means had reached his heart. The parish priest being told of his condition, hastened to the cot to administer the last rites of "the church." "Confess your sins to me, Michael Doyne," said the priest. Raising himself from the pillow, the dying man said, "Your Reverance, you are eighteen hundred years too late. Jesus Christ has put all my sins away by His precious blood, and my soul is at peace." With bell and book Michael was excommunicated from the "true church" next Sunday, but at the same hour, Michael's ransomed spirit went to be with Christ, whose one sacrifice he had learned had put away his sins (Heb. 9:26)
 - E. How important is it to get Christmas right?
 - 1. Blood is mentioned over 300 times in the Bible and is essential to the doctrine of Christ's atonement. It lies at the very heart of the Gospel, for it is through "the blood of his cross" that Jesus reconciled us to God (see Colossians 1:20-23). Some years ago a terrible railroad accident occurred, killing many people. A commuter train had stalled on the tracks just a few minutes before a fast freight was due to arrive. A conductor was quickly sent to flag down the approaching "flier." Being assured that all was well, the passengers relaxed. Suddenly, however, the speeding freight came bearing down upon them. The crash left a ghastly scene of horror. The engineer of the second train, who escaped death by jumping from the cab, was called into court to explain why he hadn't stopped. "I saw a man waving a warning flag," he said, "but it was yellow, so I thought he just wanted me to slow down." When the flag was examined, the mystery was explained. It had been red,

but because of long exposure to the sun and weather, it had become a dirty yellow. Dr. Harry Ironside commented on this incident: "O the lives eternally wrecked by the 'yellow gospels' we are hearing today - the bloodless theories of unregenerated men that send their hearers to their doom instead of stopping them on their downward road!" Dear friend, only Christ and His sacrifice on the cross can redeem your soul (see Romans 5:8,9). Don't be deceived by an anemic "yellow gospel" of works that is powerless to save you from everlasting destruction.

This Christmas each of us will receive various gifts. Some will be worth much and others will be mere trinkets. But they are all trinkets compared to the Gift God gave 2,000 years ago when He sent His son, as the angel said, "To save His people from their sins."