

# A Broad and Narrow Salvation

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## Introduction

### The Text

<sup>25</sup> 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. <sup>26</sup> 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. <sup>27</sup> 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, <sup>28</sup> he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,

<sup>29</sup> "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; <sup>30</sup> for my eyes have seen your salvation <sup>31</sup> that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, <sup>32</sup> a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel."

<sup>33</sup> And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. <sup>34</sup> 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 <sup>35</sup> (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."

<sup>36</sup> And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, <sup>37</sup> and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. <sup>38</sup> And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem. (Luke 2:25–38)

### The Sight and Surprise of Salvation

- A. Simeon immediately makes plain for us a profound fact: to see Jesus is to see the Lord's salvation. For when he comes upon the infant Christ in the temple, he takes him up in his arms and blesses God saying: "My eyes have seen Your salvation" (v. 30).
  - 1. This is our prayer for every loved one, every coworker, every person in this city, and every unbeliever in this room, is it not? That all, by grace, would see in Jesus the salvation of God! May God be pleased to use this sermon towards that end!
- B. But immediately upon seeing Him in this way, we are brought to face how surprising the Lord's salvation really is. It's never what we would expect.
  - 1. In the case of our text this morning there are two seemingly paradoxical surprises that present themselves to us. Investigating them shall take up our time this morning:
    - a. In Simeon's blessing of God with a hymn (vv. 29-32), we are surprised to find that the Lord's salvation as revealed in Jesus is much broader than first expected.

- b. In Simeon’s blessing of Mary and Joseph (vv. 33-35), we are surprised to find that the Lord’s salvation as revealed in Jesus is much narrower than first expected.
- c. To set this up with a summary statement let me put it this way: With the coming of Christ, God’s plan of salvation simultaneously broadens to include more than ethnic Israel (vv. 29-32), and narrows to include less than ethnic Israel (vv. 33-35).

## (1) A Broad Salvation (vv. 29-32)

### More than a National Prodigy

- A. Let us deal with the first surprise mentioned by looking closer at the hymn of Simeon in vv. 29-32: the Lord’s salvation as revealed in Jesus is much broader than first expected.
- B. While there are many things we could bring out from the hymn Simeon sings over this child, I would want to draw our attention first of all to the plural nouns: “peoples” (v. 31b) and “Gentiles” (v. 32a).
  - 1. Here in Luke’s gospel is the first clear indication of the universal reach of Christ’s salvation—this child is more than a national prodigy...He has come for the world!
- C. With most (if not all) of us in this room Gentiles, and with the gospel of Christ now over two millennia strong, these plural nouns might not come as a surprise to us. While we revel in them, we are perhaps no longer surprised by them.
  - 1. But for many Jews of Jesus’ day—though the law and the prophets thoroughly prepared them for the broadening contours of God’s salvation—such a declaration by Simeon would have seemed like high scandal.
    - a. Consider this sentiment found in the later Jewish literature: “As the sacred food was intended...not for the dogs, the Torah was intended to be given...not to the Gentiles” (Babylonian Talmud Hagigah 13a). “Now you’re telling me not just that the Torah is to be given to them, but the Christ?!”

### The Ceremonial Context

- A. When we consider the ceremonial context that stands behind Simeon’s hymn (vv. 21-24, 27)—we are better positioned to perceive the surprise that such a statement would bring to the average Israelite.
  - 1. As we saw last week, Joseph and Mary have come to the temple in Jerusalem to participate in the various ceremonies or “custom(s) of [Israel’s] Law” (v. 27b): (1) The circumcision of a male child; (2) The purification of a woman after childbirth; and (3) The consecration of a firstborn male child to YHWH.
- B. While there are many reasons why these ceremonies were given by God to the people of Israel, for our purposes here it is important that we realize they were given to set Israel

apart from the nations as God's covenant people: " <sup>4</sup>You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. <sup>5</sup>Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; <sup>6a</sup>and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex 19:4–6a).

1. "I'm bringing you out of Egypt and I'm giving you my law so that you will stand out among the nations as holy, separate, set apart." In other words, there is an exclusivity inherent in the law and its ceremonies.
- C. But then, in our text, amazingly, it is precisely as the newborn Christ and His family are participating in these exclusive rituals, that Simeon comes in and declares: "This baby, the Christ, His salvation, is for everyone!"
1. The exclusivity of these moments suddenly, surprisingly gives way to a universal inclusivity! "You have been set apart from the nations, Israel, for the sake of the nations!"

## Exclusion for Inclusion

- A. This text is part of a much bigger dynamic that has been developed in all of Scripture which could be summed up in three words: exclusion for inclusion.
1. It's a dynamic that's been present from the beginning, rooted in the nature of God Himself:
    - a. Because He is holy and just He in many ways must exclude us from His presence. But because He is loving and gracious His ultimate goal is always to include us in His presence. Exclusion for inclusion.

### (1) Adam

- A. Consider what is pictured already with Adam in the garden. There seems to have been a plot of land separated out as holy from all the rest. The rest was, in this sense, excluded. Eden was marked as a sort of sanctuary, a temple on earth.
1. But, were Adam and Eve to hide away here to the neglect of all the rest? Was this a sort of holy huddle established at the very beginning?
    - a. No! It was always God's purpose, though the extremities of the creation were at first excluded, to include them in the end. The boundaries of the holy land of Eden were to be extended as man cultivated, had dominion, bore fruit, multiplied, and filled the earth with God's image...until the whole earth was a sanctuary.

### (2) Israel

- A. After Adam’s sin, due to the persistence of God’s grace, the same dynamic continues only now in a fallen context. God chooses from among fallen mankind, one man, Abraham, from which to establish a kingdom of priests and holy nation. They are certainly set apart from all the other nations. The other nations are excluded.
  - 1. But it was never intended to stay there. It is true that all of these ceremonies, these customs of the law, dealing with cleanness and uncleanness, morality and immorality, etc. were to set Israel apart from the Gentiles. But, in so doing, God was at the same time setting them up as a theater unto the nations.
    - a. This is what Simeon means when he says: “<sup>30</sup> My eyes have seen your salvation<sup>31</sup> that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples” (vv. 30-31).
      - i. The salvation found in Christ, has been promised to and prepared for in Israel “in the presence of all peoples.” There’s been an audience from the beginning. God set up Israel as a theater unto the nations!
- B. The nations were to look in and discern what God is like, what man is like, and where salvation is found. Israel was commissioned by God to keep telling the nations that ancient story of creation, fall, and coming redemption.
  - 1. They were not set apart by God not to be superior to the nations but to be servants of the nations!
- C. As evidence of this, consider the ceremony of circumcision—the critical mark of the covenant people of God.
  - 1. So critical was this mark, in fact, that Jews could be referred to simply as “the circumcision” and Gentiles as “the uncircumcision” (Eph 2:11). Here is the fundamental dividing line: Do you have the mark of the Abrahamic covenant, or not? If you do, you’re in. If you don’t, you’re out.
- D. We might think with circumcision that God is just excluding the nations here. But a closer look at the initiation of this ceremony with Abraham yields a completely different sense.
  - 1. Circumcision was given to Abraham immediately following God’s covenant promise to him that he “shall be the father of a multitude of nations” (Gen 17:4).
    - a. And then God asks: “What should be the sign of this covenant? Circumcision!” Was circumcision a line that divided Israel from the nations? Yes. But it was also a sign and seal of a divine promise that that line would itself broaden out to encompass all the families of the earth!
      - i. The very mark of exclusivity was itself also the sign and seal of an ultimate inclusivity!

### (3) Christ

- A. And now the salvation promised to and prepared for by Israel in the presence of the nations has arrived in Jesus Christ. The theater has served its purpose: to provide the stage and the audience...so that the Star of the story can shine!
- B. Jesus comes as the full realization of Israel's mission: exclusion for inclusion.
  - 1. He fulfills both sides of this dynamic. He is set apart, holy, the Son of God, God in the flesh, there is none like Him, we all are excluded from His righteousness, His perfection, His purity, His glory...and yet He comes to include us in them.
    - a. The only One rightly included in the community of God was excluded from it on the cross, so that sinners—Jew and Gentile—alike might come running in! “<sup>11</sup> Remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—<sup>12</sup> remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.<sup>13</sup> But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ” (Eph 2:11–13).
- C. It doesn't matter if you don't have all the right external marks.
  - 1. Maybe you don't know all the right verses, or use all the right words. Maybe you don't have a Jesus fish on your car, or a cross tattoo on your wrist. Maybe you aren't always smiling, or humming Amazing Grace. Maybe you find K-Love to be less positive and encouraging and more painful and enraging. Maybe you walk into a church service and feel like an outsider, like one outside the line.
    - a. But the text we just read says: No matter how out you feel, He has made a way in. It's as if Jesus dips His finger in the red of His own blood and draws with it a line, that to your great surprise, includes within its compass even you, even me!

### (4) The Church

- A. We must turn this discussion on ourselves at this point. For Christ gives this same mission to the church that now follows behind Him by His Spirit.
  - 1. Peter applies Exo 19:5-6 to the church in Christ: “You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9).
    - a. You've been set apart, there's exclusion here, but it's for the sake of inclusion, proclaiming to those still in darkness of His marvelous light, calling them in!

- B. We must keep both sides of this dynamic in tension. This is always difficult for the church. How much more so in our day. With the culture pressing in you see churches falling off on either side.
1. Some go hyper-exclusive, they stiff-arm the culture, pull away from it.
    - a. But the call for the church is not to be a city in the hills but a city on a hill. We are not to run off like monks into the hills, creating our own counter-culture. No! We are to be a city on a hill. We are set apart but we are within their view, we are inviting them in, we have a radiance, that beckons. We shine like lighthouse calling in those lost and tired at sea! “Here is land, here is the way home!”
      - i. Can I just say it? This might mean calling in people you don’t like. Drawing the line around people you wouldn’t naturally hang with.
  2. Some, falling off on the other side, go hyper-inclusive, they limp-wrist the culture, embrace it wholesale.
    - a. “Jesus is love,” they say. But any love that foregoes truth is only hate in disguise. If we don’t call men out of sin we let them die in it!
      - i. Can I just say it? This might mean speaking the hard word in love and losing that friend or that job, or whatever. Drawing the line and saying: “I’m sorry, Christ just isn’t in this.”
  3. The world desperately needs the church to maintain the exclusion-for-inclusion love of Jesus.
    - a. He does not stiff-arm them—“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (Joh 1:14); and He does not limp-wrist them—“From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand’” (Matt 4:17).
      - i. He loves them in truth. He loves them to death.

## (2) A Narrow Salvation (vv. 33-35)

### Division for Deliverance

- A. But there is another surprise we must deal with before drawing this to a close.
1. For while vv. 29-32 showed God’s salvation in Jesus to be broader than we first expected, when Simeon turns then to bless Mary and Joseph in vv. 33-35, we come to find that God’s salvation in Jesus is, at the same time, narrower than we first expected.

- B. Lest there be any premature celebration after his declaration of the universal reach of the Messiah's salvation, immediately Simeon turns to the parents with sobering words: "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed<sup>35</sup> (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed" (vv. 33b-35).
1. This is going to hurt. It's going to cut you up inside. Your child, the Messiah, will not merely march to victory, nor will all men happily come under His redemptive reign. He will be opposed, rejected. And even within the nation of Israel itself, He will cause some to rise, and others to fall.
- C. The Christ it was assumed would deliver the nation from its years of foreign oppression and set them up at the head of the nations. But here the indication is that this Christ, will not merely deliver the nation, He will also divide it.
1. We have here what Paul refers to in [Rom 9:6b](#) when he says: "Not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel." Meaning, there are some who have been circumcised in the flesh by men that are not circumcised in the heart by the Spirit.
    - a. And Jesus divides the sheep from the goats in Israel, everywhere He goes!
- D. John the Baptist sets the wedge in place with words spoken to the Jews like those in [Luk 3:8b-9](#): " <sup>8b</sup>Do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. <sup>9</sup>Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees.'"
  1. And then Jesus, with word and deed, drives the wedge down to the bottom, until we read in [Luk 19:47b-48](#): " <sup>47b</sup>The chief priests and the scribes and the principal men of the people were seeking to destroy him, <sup>48</sup>but they did not find anything they could do, for all the people were hanging on his words."
    - a. There are two groups in Israel: those who are hanging on every word He says, and those who want to kill Him, and will in just a few days.

## Exposing the Parade of Empty Religion

- A. Jesus has a way of exposing what's in a man. He's not interested in the parade of empty religion. He doesn't care about your skin.
1. If under my first heading the concern was: "I don't have the marks, can I still be in?!" Under this heading now the concern is: "I do have all the marks but am I really in?!"
    - a. You know the right verses. You know the right things to say. You know how do march in the Christian parade. But does He have your heart? Are you hanging on His words?

- B. I don't have time to go into much detail concerning Simeon and Anna, but they represent this kind of people.
  - 1. They gave their whole lives for this. "Waiting for the consolation of Israel...waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem" (vv. 25, 38)...hanging on His words, because He has their hearts.
    - a. Does He have yours? Does He have mine?