

Sermon Outline

THE YEAR IN OUR LORD, 2013-2014

THE CHILD WHO DIVIDES

LUKE 2:33-35

I. Introduction

II. Appointed for the Fall and rise of Many (Luke 2:34)

- A. Christmas degenerates into mere sentimentality when we want Jesus to remain a sweet little helpless baby, when we refuse to allow the baby to grow up and challenge us as our rightful King.
1. What Simeon says next must also be heeded both by the Church and the world.
 2. The human race cannot remain at the manger, gazing in wonder upon the Christ Child.
 3. The world must see that even at the moment of his birth, the Christ Child has become a force to be reckoned with.
 4. This Christ Child is going to make—and has already made—some people in high places very, very uncomfortable.
- B. Verses 34-35 comprise the second part of his prophecy: “And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, ‘Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel...’”
1. Because of Jesus, many will be raised up and exalted; but by that same token, many people will also be brought low.
 2. Jesus is going to upset the status quo; he will bring about a certain level of instability and disharmony to human society.
 3. The language of falling and rising sounds like the churning of the sea, or an earthquake, which conforms to Isaiah 40:3-5:
*³ A voice cries:
“In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD;
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
⁴ Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.
⁵ And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,
and all flesh shall see it together,
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”*
 4. When the Lord Jesus returns, the proud and the powerful will be brought low; while the weak, poor, but repentant will be made powerful.

5. God will bring about the very renovation of human society itself.
 6. A society's heart may once have been Wealth, or Technology, or any number of false gods.
—But when God comes into the world in the person of Jesus, he comes to take his rightful place at the Center of the human race.
 7. God has begun to rearrange human society around Jesus Christ.
—Those who believe in Jesus and swear allegiance to him will be exalted; those who reject Jesus, though they be powerful, will find themselves relegated to the dumpster of history.
- C. If Mary and Joseph were pious Jews of their day; they would have immediately thought of people like Caesar and Herod, and the entire machine of Roman, anti-YHWH, anti-Israel oppression.
- D. These were the powerful that would be brought low.
1. Of course, they would also be thinking of weak people like themselves, who, though sinful, nonetheless had put their hope in the Lord.
 2. As the Psalmist often says, those who hope in the Lord would not be put to shame.
- E. It is also worth pointing out where Jesus will bring instability. Simeon says, “the fall and rising of many *in Israel*...”
1. That's where Jesus will do his work. Or perhaps we can say, that's where Jesus will begin his work.
 2. How would Jesus bring about the fall and rising of many in Israel?
 - a. Because he is the rightful *King of Israel*, Jesus has authority over Herod and all the governors and centurions who were stationed in Israel.
 - b. Because he is *the Lamb of God* who makes perfect atonement for the sins of the world, Jesus replaces the Jewish temple and renders it redundant.
 - c. Because Jesus is *the true Son of God*—Son of God in the sense that he inherits David's throne; but Son of God also in the sense that he is begotten from the Father—Jesus is superior to Caesar himself, indeed to any king or prince in the world.
 3. Long before the Christ Child even reaches adulthood, we can sense the tremendous challenge that he would pose to those in power.
 - a. While Christ would not immediately remove people from power, he would certainly require them to bow to his rule, acknowledge that the Lord is the one true God who reigns over all the kings of the world.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) How does Christmas degenerate into mere sentimentality? (2) How does Simeon's prophecy relate to Isaiah 40:3-5? (3) How would Jesus bring about the rise and fall of many in Israel?

III. A Sign That Is Opposed (Luke 2:34)

- A. Simeon goes on to say that Jesus will be “for a sign that is opposed” (*sēmeion antilegomenon*) (v 34)
- B. Those words draw out the implications of Christ being the cause of the rise and fall of many.
—Now we know for certain that Jesus will have enemies, that his rule will not go unopposed.
- C. If Psalm 2 is any indicator of what lies in the future for the Christ it’s clear that he would face the rage of the nations.
- ¹ Why do the nations rage
and the peoples plot in vain?*
- ² The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers take counsel together,
against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying,*
- ³ “Let us burst their bonds apart
and cast away their cords from us.”*
1. Those words reflect the mindset of all who would oppose Christ Jesus.
 2. But we hear those words today in our secularized world, don’t we? If we didn’t know any better, we would think that Psalm 2 was speaking to our highly secularized, postmodern world.
 3. Psalm 2 supports the prophecy of Simeon: If Jesus is the Christ, the anointed Son of God and the rightful heir to the throne of David, then as Psalm 2 has already said, the nations will rage against him; the kings and rulers of the world will plot against Christ.
- D. For Mary and Joseph, it’s as if a shadow has cast over their family. What parent would ever want his or her child to have enemies?

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What does it mean for Jesus to be “for a sign that is opposed”? (2) What does Psalm 2 tell us about the acceptance of the Christ’s rule? Would it be willingly accepted? (3) How do you think our Lord’s family would have felt when they heard the prophecy concerning their son?

IV. As the Son, so also his People

- A. Simeon’s words impact all who belong to Jesus.
1. One of the truths that we see played out in the New Testament is that if we are joined to Christ, we will also be joined to his sufferings (cf. 2 Cor 1:5; Phil 3:10; 1 Pet 4:13).
 2. The world will plot against the true Church of Jesus Christ as it plots against their Lord.

- B. Throughout the history of the Church in the world, we have seen such antichrist forces oppressing the Church.
- C. Jesus himself prepared us for this in John 15:18, 19? “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.”
1. What is true for the Master would also be true for the servant (albeit to a lesser degree).
 2. If the world opposed the Christ, the world would also oppose his children.
 3. In Jesus’ day, opposition took the form of Pharisaic Judaism and the Roman Empire. Today, it’s other things.
 4. While the form of the opposition may change, the underlying principle remains the same: The spirit of antichrist continues to rouse the rulers of the world to oppress the Church.
 5. In this way, Simeon’s prophecy continues to be true. Jesus continues to be “for a sign that is opposed” (v 34).

***Questions for reflection:** (1) Why does opposition to Christ affect his Church? (2) What did Jesus teach in John 15:18, 19? (3) What are the antichrist forces confronting the Church today?

V. A Mother’s Grief (Luke 2:35)

- A. Then we come to the mysterious but disturbing words of verse 35: “(and a sword will pierce through your own soul also)...”
1. As Jesus is opposed, his own mother will feel it in her heart.
 2. In his commentary on Luke, John Nolland writes:
it seems we must find mirrored in the words concerning Mary the full degree to which her son will be ‘opposed’...a sword will pass through her soul (she will suffer the loss of her son in death) because the opposition to her son will reach such a pitch that by the hands of his opponents a sword will pass through his soul (he will be put to death). (Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20*, 121-2)
- B. Nolland also thinks that this verse could be an allusion to several biblical passages:
1. Psalm 22:10: “Deliver my soul from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dog!”
 2. Zechariah 12:10: “And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn.”

- C. Many who enjoy Christmas don't ever want to hear of death and gloom—or of the sword that would pierce the mother's heart.
- D. Yet, if we reject these hard and disturbing truths, we also end up rejecting the very purpose for which Jesus came: Jesus came precisely to suffer for the sins of the world; to take upon himself the full weight of evil that is in the world.—For that reason, suffering is very much be part and parcel of his mission.
- E. In fact, the foundation of the Kingdom of Jesus is precisely his suffering and death on cross.
 1. This is precisely what sets the Christ apart from the rest of the kings of the world.
 2. It's not that other kings have no concept of suffering hardship for their people.
 3. But for this King—Jesus the Christ—his death itself will be his defining achievement.
- F. No wonder Paul says what he does in 1 Corinthians 1:22-25:
For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.
- G. Unlike the rulers of this world, Jesus' rule will be defined by his suffering, his death!
- H. If we cannot accept a God who is willing to condescend in suffering love for his people, we do not know God as we think we do—nor can we become the people of longsuffering love our God desires us to be.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What do the words “(and a sword will pierce through your own soul also)...” tell us about Mary's future? (2) “Unlike the rulers of this world, Jesus' rule will be defined by his suffering, particularly his death!” Discuss. (3) Can you accept that God is willing to condescend in suffering love for his people? Do you have a problem with this view of God? Do you think it undermines his greatness? If so, why?

VI. The Revealing of Inner Thoughts (Luke 2:35)

- A. The reason for Christ's being a sign is in the final clause of verse 35: It's “so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.”
- B. By choosing to reject him, the people of Israel and of the world will reveal what is in their true natures.

—Behind all their respectable externals and purported love of good conservative morals (like the Pharisees), those who reject Christ reveal where their true allegiance lies—they are sons of the devil (Jn 8:44), the spiritual descendants of old man Canaan himself.

- C. So do you see why Christ is such a threat? He reveals the distinction between good and evil, a distinction that tends to be blurred by external accomplishments.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What is the reason for Christ being a sign? (2) By choosing to reject Christ, the hearts of people are revealed.

VII. Choose Light and Life in Christ Jesus

The separation of light and darkness has already begun around the person of Christ. Since Christ has come to divide the world between those who belong to God and those who belong to Satan, let us choose Christ. If you are not yet a believer in Jesus, now is always a good time to believe. Choose to put your faith in the Lord. Choose to receive him as God's gift of mercy to you. If you have been a believer in Jesus for some time, now is also a good time to renew your faith in Jesus. God gave Jesus Christ to be our glory and our light. Nothing we did has made us worthy of this gift. It is all by God's grace. But God does call us to receive Christ; to trust in him for our salvation; and then from there, to live for him as our blessed King and First-love all the days of our lives.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) Since God has given Christ to divide the world between those who belong to God and those who do not, how should we respond to Christ? (2) What prevents you from entrusting your life to Jesus? (3) If you are a believer in the Lord, how is your walk with him? How closely are you following him? What concrete steps can you take to grow closer to him?