

"The Cliffhanger"

December 31, 2017

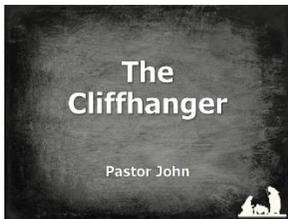
Scripture: Luke 2: 22-40

²² 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 ²³ (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord"), ²⁴ and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."

²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. ²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. ²⁷ Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, ²⁸ Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, ²⁹ "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; ³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation, ³¹ which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, ³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." ³³ And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. ³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed ³⁵ so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed — and a sword will pierce your own soul too."

³⁶ There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her

marriage, ³⁷ then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. ³⁸ At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. ³⁹ When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. ⁴⁰ The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.



The holiday frenzy is over and the big celebration of Christmas is over. All the gifts have been unwrapped. We begin to let out a collective exhale. But our story is just beginning to unfold. Just as the wise men are proverbially on their way, we too are just beginning our journey with Jesus. In today's passage, we get a glimpse of one of the earliest childhood moments in Jesus' life. In our unfolding story, we move from Mary and Joseph with the baby Jesus in the manger to Mary and Joseph with the baby Jesus in the temple, following all of the laws prescribed by the Moses. Our story does not end here either. It is just begun. Let us pray.

After the forty days of purification were completed, Jesus was brought to the temple to be consecrated to the Lord. Jewish Law called for the circumcision of all males and this ceremony was the official rite that admitted one into covenant relationship with God. After his circumcision, Jesus will officially receive his name as it is entered in the temple book. And then, as a first-born, Jesus will also receive a special blessing because *"every firstborn male shall be designated*

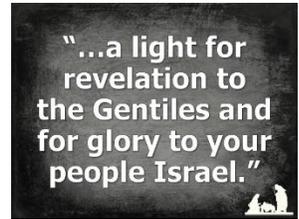
as holy to the Lord". Mary and Joseph then would have chosen to redeem Jesus instead of leaving him to serve in the temple. They gave the requisite offering of two doves so that Jesus could return with them to Nazareth to grow up in their home, to learn the family trade. All of these actions that Mary and Joseph took on behalf of their son Jesus were in accordance with and in obedience to the Law. But before they returned to Nazareth, Mary and Joseph meet two important characters in our unfolding story.

We first meet Simeon. Simeon is *"righteous and devout"* – righteous towards men and devout towards God. He is revered amongst his peers. He was known for his piety and his communion with God. Earlier in life he was the head of the college his father had founded and was given the name *"Rabbar"* – the highest title given to a doctor. Simeon was one of only seven ever named to this position. Simeon was blessed with the presence of the Holy Spirit in his life and he waited patiently and eagerly for the *"consolation of Israel"*. At this time, the nation of Israel was both harassed and oppressed by the Romans. Jesus is the Messiah, the consolation of Israel. Simeon had been promised that he would see the Lord's Messiah before he saw death. So, at just the right time, the Holy Spirit whispered into Simeon's ear, "Go to the temple". He must have known what was about to come. With great joy, he went to the temple. When Mary and Joseph come in with Jesus, Simeon knows. He knows this is the one. He takes up the baby Jesus in his arms and declares, *"Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation"*. What he has been waiting for has come to fruition.



Simeon tells Mary and Joseph that Jesus will be *"a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel"*.

This is the first inclination that the Messiah is coming for more than just the Jewish people. Mary and Joseph were amazed by all that Simeon had to say about their son. He then blessed them and prayed for them as Jesus' parents, knowing that they would play a special role in raising this child who would be the Messiah or Savior for the whole world. Simeon then went on to say, *"This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed — and a sword will pierce your own soul too."* Simeon lets them know that there will be turmoil and that there will be pain along with Jesus being a light to the nations. And it will be personal for them too. "A sword will pierce your own soul too". Jesus will have a great impact on the world. His life will affect their lives as well. Jesus will cause many in Israel to fall – He will be a snare to some as their inner thoughts and impure motives will be revealed. He will also cause many to rise – through Jesus many will find eternal life.



Next Mary and Joseph encounter Anna. She was known as a prophetess who probably resided in the temple courts. Even though an old woman, at eighty-four, she still fasted and prayed day and night. Much like Simeon, the Holy Spirit was strong within her, often allowing her to speak with great understanding concerning the scriptures. Anna also finds Jesus in the temple and she *"began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem"*. She also reiterates that Jesus is the redemption of Israel.



Both Simeon and Anna speak of the future that Jesus will yet live into. It now feels like we are in the in-between time – the birth and dedication of Jesus have been completed and we wait for the time of temptation in the wilderness, for Jesus’ baptism, and for His ministry to begin to unfold. We too may feel that we are in a similar place. Christmas is over and the New Year lies just ahead. We have spent the past month preparing for the coming of Jesus in many ways – reminding ourselves that Christmas is more than the giving and receiving of gifts, anticipating our Christmas Eve worship services, hoping that the miracle will change our lives and our world. As the New Year dawns, we spend some time in reflection, reviewing the good and bad of 2017 and maybe we even make a few New Year’s resolutions.

But the truth is, the story does not end here. The blessings in the temple are not the end of the story. In fact, the story has just begun. We are left with a cliffhanger – there are loose ends and we want to know more. How will Jesus cause the falling and rising of many? How will He be a light for revelation?



In our story, we see that Mary and Joseph observe the long-time traditions and rituals of their faith. They have Jesus circumcised, named, and presented. Jesus will be raised as a devout Jew, observing all the festivals, honoring all the laws, offering all the proper sacrifices. Throughout His life, Jesus will continue to be obedient to God. In the temple, Simeon also blesses Jesus. Through Simeon’s words, Jesus’ life is set on a course that has really been set for many eons.

Through Simeon's words, we see that Jesus is set to walk down a prophetic path that will be the fulfillment of many ancient prophecies. It is in Jesus' faithful obedience to God and His will that we see for ourselves what obedience to God truly looks like. As the curtain falls on this first part of the story, we can look forward to what comes next. Over the course of the next six weeks we will delve into just who this Jesus is. Until then, I invite us all to ponder our role in this unfolding story. Like Jesus, may we too live in faithful obedience to God's call upon our lives as we seek to live a real faith, an active faith, a servant's faith, out there in the world. May it be so for you and for me. Amen.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve

- 1) What faith traditions and rituals can you better practice to grow your faith and to deepen your walk of faith – worship, prayer, study...?
- 2) Jesus was the redemption of all people. Who can you specifically pray for this week that needs to experience redemption and salvation?
- 3) Just as Simeon and Anna faithfully responded to the Spirit's direction in their lives, where is God calling you to be of service this week?