

Behold this child

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 January 2000

Preacher: Rev R.G.Mackay

[0 : 0 0] We turn back now to Luke chapter 2. Luke chapter 2. And we can center our thoughts around verses 34 and 35. Luke chapter 2 and the verses 34 and 35.

And Simeon blessed them and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be spoken against.

Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed. These words of Simeon, I feel, really sum up the whole teaching of the passage that we read together earlier.

Perhaps they especially help us to focus on what this passage is teaching us, because of course Simeon's words at this point begin with, Behold, this child.

And these words certainly sum up the whole of Luke chapter 2. Behold, this child.

[1 : 1 8] You may remember that when we were looking through Luke chapter 1, we saw that the child, even before the child was born, was almost bursting through to be noticed and to be acknowledged and to be wondered at.

But now the child is born and is clearly seen. And the Holy Spirit's intent, as he works through Luke in the writing down of this chapter, which is now Luke chapter 2, is certainly, Behold, this child.

And as Simeon also makes clear, Behold, this child, because this child is to be the only saviour of the world.

And what Luke does under the inspiration of the Spirit, as he lifts up this child to us in this chapter, what he does for us at this early stage in his gospel, is to delineate for us the main elements of the work that is to be involved in Jesus being the saviour of the world.

Behold this child and behold the main elements of the work that he will do now that he is here. And so the first thing that I would like us to notice, and we have it really in our verse, and we certainly have it in the surrounding passage, I want us to notice the humiliation of Jesus.

[3 : 1 8] The humiliation of Jesus. This is a vital element in his work as saviour.

And the circumstances in which Simeon gives to us this prophecy describe for us very well this humiliation.

Just the fact that when Simeon says, this child, he is cradling in his arms a little baby, just a few weeks old.

And the one by whom are all things, and for whom are all things, is this child, so weak and so vulnerable in the arms of Simeon?

Of course it is difficult for us to take it in. But it is very right that we constantly ask the Spirit to help us to be convinced of the great and humiliating downward journey that our Lord, the Eternal One, Jesus Christ the Son, the great downward journey that he took, the great restrictions and inabilities with which he clothed himself in his humanity, that he might come where we are, that he might be humiliated and humbled as we are.

[5 : 23] And this is the one who is this child of Luke chapter 2. And it seems to me that his humiliation, when we think of this child, is emphasized again right at the end of the passage that we read.

If we go to verse 40, which was the last verse that we read a little earlier, and this child, the child, the same child, grew and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him.

The child grew. The child became stronger day by day.

That tells us, you see, that the Lord of infinite power and strength and wisdom and grace became in his humanity daily the recipient of such strength and wisdom and grace.

daily he grew in physical strength so that each day he could say that lacks that he had in his humanity, not sinful lacks, but natural inadequacies, typical of fallenness, were supplied from a birth.

[7 : 07] And God, his father, through the work of the Holy Spirit, enabled the child, enabled the man, Christ Jesus, to become stronger and to become wiser and to be filled more and more with God's enabling grace as he grew in capacity, mental and physical capacity, to use that grace and that enabling.

Helpless, dependent. That's what that verse 40 speaks about. And so it tells us that his humiliation of Jesus, his coming down to be like us, to feel what we feel, to experience what we experience, to develop in many of the ways that we develop, that he might understand us, that he might be like us, that there might be a solidarity between Christ and his people.

That humiliation was his. But the passage speaks of other aspects of this humiliation.

Luke wants to emphasise this humiliation right from the beginning. And this child underwent other procedures and was associated with other events, religious events.

The first took place eight days after he was born. And it was that event that always took place on the eighth day when there was a male child born in Israel.

[9 : 02] I think we have a right to assume that it took place in Bethlehem. It certainly seems that the wise men visited Jesus there some time after he was born.

And so it's more than likely that on the eighth day Jesus was still in Bethlehem. But it's not of great import. And he was circumcised. He had that bloody and painful operation done on him.

The cutting away of the foreskin that spoke as the Old Testament, the law of God in Old Testament times makes so clear.

It spoke of the need for man in sin to have a cutting, purifying work done by God right at the generative root of humanity.

And Jesus also underwent this procedure. that's not to allow us to believe when we weigh up the rest of Scripture that he was a sinner.

[10 : 19] But it is to allow us to see that right from the beginning there were many ways in which he was treated as a sinner. As he was especially when he hung on the cross.

without sin no sinner himself but becoming sin for us he who knew no sin being identified at every point with the sinner's way.

And then sometime later the family go up to Jerusalem a few weeks later and there they have to offer the sacrifice the sacrifice particularly for Mary's purification to deliver from the impurities associated with her bloody birth.

and Jesus also is treated as one who is implicated in the need for such sacrifice to keep the whole family right with God.

The humiliation is also emphasised by the fact that it is the sacrifice of the poorest of the poor that Mary and Joseph are able to offer and that's the sacrifice that is offered the turtle doves the cheap sacrifice for those who could afford no more expensive to them but costing very little.

[12 : 14] And so you see there is this association with the laws of the Old Testament the laws that were preparatory the laws that were there to lead us to Christ to show us our need of a saviour to show us the deep rootedness and the extensiveness of sin in the lives of all of us.

and so as we see Jesus implicated in these sort of rituals we wonder can this really be the son of God or is he also a sinner like ourselves but no the word makes it perfectly clear especially perhaps in Galatians chapter 4 and verse 4 when the fullness of the time was come God sent his son made of a woman made under the law made to take her place you see under the law and to satisfy in every way on the behalf of his people as the hymn writer keeps it in my place condemned he stood and the picture of that humiliation taking the place of his people it's not just there on

Calvary towards the end of his life it's there from the very beginning it's such a vital part of the work that Jesus has come to do and it's there later on when Jesus begins his public ministry and when he comes to be baptized with the baptism of repentance he who needs not to repent himself again he is made to be under the law and he takes that baptism for us part of his humiliation and when John says I can't do such a thing Jesus replied let it be so now it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness humble to a place of living under the law in every respect until finally he would die under the curse of the law against sin that he might fulfill righteousness for his people that they might be justified that they might receive a righteousness that

Christ has worked out for them that's what being justified means one of the commentators you've probably often heard it has described what this important word in the bible means by saying it means justified just as if I'd never sinned just as if I'd never sinned what's the righteousness that Christ is able to give to his people because of his humiliation they can live before God with Christ's righteousness covering them from the wrath of God when they trust in Jesus just as if they'd never sinned because right from the beginning Jesus lived a life of humiliation just as if he had sinned the righteous taking the place of the unrighteous that the unrighteous through faith in him might take the place of the righteous sinned but then we need to move on and we need to see another aspect of the work we need to see that the passage of so and

Simeon's words here begin to speak perhaps in veiled terms but begin to speak not only of the humiliation of Jesus but of the exaltation of Jesus there's a mingling right from the beginning in the way that Luke opens up the story of Jesus this child who has come from heaven undergoing great humiliation but there is no doubt that in the purposes of God this same child has been born for great exaltation we saw that already in Luke chapter 1 and it's here in Luke chapter 2 as well God has prepared those who are waiting for Jesus and who are able to recognize him even as a child as God saviour there is evidence you see in Luke chapter 2 of the sending of the Holy Spirit from heaven to inspire people like

[17 : 23] Simeon and Anna so that they are ready to proclaim the truth concerning God's great and eternal purposes for this child Jesus and at verses 30 and 31 Simeon proclaims so clearly that this child is at the center of God's purposes for mine eyes have seen thy salvation which thou was prepared before the face or for the face of all people the whole world that was the aim of Luke's gospel it's here in the words of Simeon again here is one who can be lifted up and who can be shown as the only one for the salvation of all sorts of people whoever they be throughout the whole world and then the intimation of Simeon in the words of our text are beginning to suggest that with the humiliation there is going to be a compensatory exaltation because his coming is both for a falling and for a rising we'll come back to that phrase in a minute but it's foretelling yes perhaps in veiled language the falling of the humiliation of the death of

Jesus but the rising afterwards of the exaltation of his resurrection it seems to me that there is one interesting thing about the circumstance of this early proclamation of the exaltation of Jesus and it's the fact that God it seems to me specifically uses old people to proclaim this great message of hope of the exaltation that Jesus will know and that Jesus will bring about for others I think it's not without significance that both

Simeon and Anna are very near today the young may die but the old must die but the Christian old can be prepared by God to see the glories of exaltation surrounding the coming of the angel of day and I want to encourage those who have come to that time in their lives where they see most of their journey in this life behind them I want you to see and to believe and to know that you have a great ministry as long as the

Lord leaves you in this world and it is to proclaim with faith your hope in the exhortation that Jesus brings to his people at the end and I hope there would be none of us in this congregation who would despise the Christian old in any way indeed I'm feeling a bit guilty myself having come from St Vincent Street a very youthful congregation I have sometimes said to my friends oh the free north is quite an old congregation as if that was a disadvantage I think already I'm coming to see that if there was anything disparaging about these remarks they were very wrong because of course already

I've come to know some of the Christian old and to see the value of a mature peaceable Christian life that belongs to many in this congregation you who are young in the faith would do well to try and get to know some of the Christian old of our congregation and you who feel that you are now well on in years but are the Lord's people be assured that God has a ministry for you to proclaim that you have confidence in the final exaltation that God has promised for all his people in Christ so we see the humiliation of

[22 : 59] Jesus the exaltation of Jesus but we see of course very clearly in the passage and in the words of our text something about the salvation of Jesus it is because of his humiliation and his exaltation that he is to be the saviour that he is a salvation that he is able to work and it is one aspect of this salvation particularly that Simeon brings out in our text and it's an aspect that's already been brought out early in the gospel of Luke and is going to be a constant theme because it's an important theme and it's the aspect of Christ's salvation that teaches us that when he comes with his salvation there is an inevitable challenge involved and that's the reason why Simeon in the words of our text talks about a twofold effect of the cross that he sees prophetically as he cradles the child

Jesus in his arms and he says of course that there will be those who will fall and rise through the cross and the resurrection let's go back to the words just for a minute behold this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel and for a sign which shall be spoken again and then it seems turning to Mary he says yea a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also this child is set for the falling and rising again of many in Israel in other words Simeon is saying the salvation that this child brings will only come when there is a falling a going down a time of difficulty a time of facing up a time of seeing problems and tests and then a consequent rising and of course the pattern of

Jesus own life was to be the mark that this was to be the way of Christ salvation there was to be first a crucifixion the picture of dying to sin the picture of being buried with Christ putting a final end to the old way of life a falling a having to recognise that the way we have been living is wrong that all that we have been doing has been mingled with our sin a falling and then as the resurrection of Jesus speaks of arising again arising again with the old life path arising again in company with the victorious power of

Jesus that can enable us that can equip us for all the difficulties that we have to face and in that is set the pattern for Christian living there's a rising and a falling that's not only there at the beginning of the Christian life but it's there over and over again as we make progress in our lives and as we die more and more to sin as we mortify the sin that still remains with us as we put it to death as we crucify it by God's power and as we rise anew from that sin that has been lingering or that has come back again when we thought we had conquered it but yet again by God's grace through faith in the and we can rise again a falling and arising again and it's not easy and

Mary's grief even the blessed Mary the mother of Jesus whom we have seen who had so much spiritual depth as the magnificence has already shown us even she is to know such experiences when it seemed as if a sword would peel her own soul and so the pattern that Jesus has set is the same pattern that Simeon speaks of whosoever loses his life for my sake will save it but there will be others who will come to that same cross and who will see it as the Jews and the Greeks of Paul's day when he wrote to the Corinthians they will see it as foolishness they will see it as a scandal they will see it as unnecessary they will see it as saying nothing to their lives and

[28 : 50] Simeon has it there and for a sign which shall be spoken against there will be those who will see the significance of it because they will face that to their sin but there will be those who will know maybe some of these are amongst us this evening I was arrested to think of this fact just this week when a friend told me of a conversation she had with an acquaintance didn't happen in this presbytery but it did happen in a free church circumstance and the conversation got round to the minister seems to be an occupational hassle and the acquaintance of my friend said oh I don't like the minister I don't really listen to him when I go he's always speaking about sin

I'm not a sinner I'm not a sinner that's a more or less regular free church attender I'm not a sinner I don't need to hear about sin these are the people who find the cross a sign to be spoken against and not only such people but such people who may say oh well yes I'm a sinner but I don't need the fall and the rising again that the death and resurrection of Jesus speaks of this is the course for the salvation of

Jesus that is saved by Simeon it's a salvation that will bring challenge to us daily challenge to us about new ways in which we need to repaint new ways in which we need to change in order to know more and more that the early chapters of Lucas full of in order to know more and more of the joy of knowing Christ's salvation in our lives it's a salvation that turns the world upside down it's a salvation that will constantly be bringing a new order to our lives it's a salvation that will be telling us again and again in this area of your life or in that there is need for a new falling and rising again there is a need for a facing up to the fact well I thought things were okay there in my life but no there's something amiss here also and I need to bring it to the cross and I need to bring it to the word of

God and I need to find out what has to go what has to change what has to enter in that I may walk on with Christ crucified with him and rising again by his grace to new obedience and to new righteousness that brings glory to our God who became for us this child Amen