

RESPONDING TO GOD'S GIFTS

LUKE 2:21-40

Since God Continually Demonstrates His Love For Us; We Ought To Respond To Him With Worship, Praise, And Obedience.

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Responding To God's Gifts

Luke 2:21-40

Last time we left off with the shepherds coming to find the baby Who was born Messiah, Savior, King of the Jews, and God in the Flesh. The shepherds followed the directions of an angel. They left worshiping and rejoicing in God. This morning we pick up the narrative on the eighth day of baby Jesus' entrance into this world as a little baby. God fulfilled what he promised to Zechariah and Elizabeth just 3 months earlier when Elizabeth gave birth to John. Now God has fulfilled what He promised Mary and Joseph in the birth of Jesus.

God is good. He keeps His promises. He gives us beautiful gifts every day. But as we have discussed many times before, we have somehow come to think that we are entitled to good things. We have somehow come to think that we are entitled to the gifts God gives us. And because of this, we can never truly be thankful. It reminds me of the first encounter a successful businessman had with his new son-in-law.

He said, "My boy, I love my daughter very much and I now welcome you into the family. To show you how much we care for you, I'm making you a 50-50 partner in my business. All you will have to do is go to the factory every day and learn the operations."

The son-in-law responded, "I hate factories. I can't stand the noise."

"I see," replied the father-in-law, "I will put you in the office and you will be in charge of our daily operations budgets."

"I hate office work," said the son-in-law, "I can't stand being stuck behind a desk all day."

By this time, the father-in-law had become more than a little frustrated. He said, "Wait a minute. I just made you a half owner in my very successful, moneymaking business. You won't work in the factory and you won't work in the office. What do you suggest I do with you?"

"Easy," the young man said, "Buy me out."

I know that it sounds kind of funny, but that's exactly the way we respond to God's blessings. As we go through the Gospel of Luke, I want to accomplish two main goals. First I want us to fully understand the events in the life of Jesus. Secondly, I want to apply the truths demonstrated in these passages to our everyday lives. Instead of walking through life, feeling as if we are entitled to everything we have or want, we need to start living lives that demonstrate thankfulness. In other words, the main idea of this morning's text is this. **SINCE GOD CONTINUALLY DEMONSTRATES HIS LOVE FOR US, WE OUGHT TO RESPOND TO HIM WITH WORSHIP, PRAISE, AND OBEDIENCE.** I know that this attitude of entitlement is going to be a hard notion to get out of our lives. People who don't do a thing feel as if they are entitled to get everything others have even though they are unwilling to work and sacrifice to get them like the others did. On the other hand, people who do work and sacrifice feel as if they are entitled to have everything they have because they earned it. Both attitudes are unbiblical and it

will take a great deal to get this notion out of our heads. The Bible is abundantly clear when it states what we are entitled to. Here is what the Bible says about all of us, with no exceptions:

“23 ... all have sinned; all fall short of God’s glorious standard. 23 ... the wages of sin is death ...” (Romans 3:23 & 6:23 / NLT).

We are richly entitled to spend an eternity in hell because of who we are and what we have accomplished for evil. If we can just keep that in mind, we will be able to live lives of thankfulness.

I. RESPONDING IN WORSHIP

In verses 21-24 we learn that one way to respond to God’s good gifts is worship. In other words, **WORSHIP IS HOW WE DEMONSTRATE OUR LOVE FOR GOD.** Over the years I have heard people say the stupidest things like, “I don’t have to go to church to worship. I can worship in my own way.” God has given us the church as the context of worship. Listen to what the author of Hebrews warns:

“25And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage and warn each other, especially now that the day of his coming back again is drawing near” (Hebrews 10:25 / NLT).

To be sure, church is not the only place we can worship, but it is the context in which we are called to primarily worship. Let’s look at the example Joseph and Mary give us.

In the first half of verse 21 and in verse 23 they dedicate their child to God. On the eighth day of Jesus’ life in the flesh, His parents brought Him to the temple to be circumcised. Circumcision was a ceremony that demonstrated their love for their child and their love for and commitment to God. In bringing Jesus to be circumcised on the eighth day shows us clearly that they were godly parents. The eighth day is the exact day commanded by the law of Moses. Circumcision was so important that even if the eighth day fell on a Sabbath day, the procedure was still performed. Circumcision put the child in a very special relationship with God and with the Hebrew community. The ceremony was a public declaration that His parents belonged to the covenant family of God and now this child belonged to God’s chosen people. The child stood in a special relationship with God through His parents’ faith and relationship with God.

The second religious ceremony they performed in the dedication process was to consecrate this Child to God. Luke quoted a portion of the command given through Moses. Here is the full quote:

“1The LORD said to Moses, 2“Consecrate to me every firstborn male. The first offspring of every womb among the Israelites belongs to me, whether man or animal” (Exodus 13:1-2 / NIV).

The word consecrate in this passage means to make holy. In other words, Joseph and Mary took Jesus to the temple, held Him out, and dedicated Him to God for God’s service.

I think this is a good time for a theology lesson. When we parents bring our children forward to baptize them or dedicate them, we are first of publicly stating that we are followers of Christ and that we have willingly joined ourselves to His family, the church. Secondly, we are stating that

we are joining our children to this covenant community and that we will raise them up to be good citizens of this community. Finally, and most importantly, we are stating that they are not our children; rather they are God's children. We are merely stewards of God's children.

And that brings us to the second half of verse 21 where submission to God's plan is described. The angel told Mary that God's Name for this baby was Jesus and so they named the baby Jesus which means Jehovah saves. Parents often have dreams for their children and often we force children into these molds. However, we must remember that God has plans for our children and His plans are meant to supersede our dreams for them. Listen to what David said in one of His Psalms about God's plan for his life:

"13You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body

and knit me together in my mother's womb.

14Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex!

Your workmanship is marvelous—and how well I know it.

15You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion,

as I was woven together in the dark of the womb.

16You saw me before I was born.

Every day of my life was recorded in your book.

Every moment was laid out

before a single day had passed.

17How precious are your thoughts about me, O God!

They are innumerable!" (Psalm 139:13-17 / NLT).

God had a very special plan for Jesus. Jesus would come to save us and rescue us from sin. Jesus had a mission that His Name described. Joseph and Mary were submitting to God's plan for Jesus. They probably didn't understand the full meaning of what they were doing, but at the very least they were saying to God, "Your will be done with our baby, not ours." This couple is indeed a righteous couple whose desire it is to serve God.

And they complete their worship by going through the purification ceremony. This will give us a little insight into how Luke compresses time and events. Jesus was circumcised on the eighth day but Mary's purification ceremony couldn't take place until the 40th day. Since there is blood and other bodily fluids discharged at birth, a woman was to be considered ceremonially unclean for 40 days after the birth of a baby boy. This didn't mean the woman was sinful, it merely rendered her unclean in the sense she couldn't participate in temple worship until the time of

uncleanness passed. Pay attention to the offering. They offered up a pair of doves or two pigeons. The sacrifice was supposed to be a one year old lamb and one dove or pigeon. However, for those who couldn't afford a lamb, another dove or pigeon could be substituted. This demonstrates that Jesus was born into an average family. They were not wealthy enough to purchase a lamb for sacrifice, but only the well to do could afford a lamb at that time. Today we would consider them a blue collar middle class working family.

Joseph and Mary clearly demonstrated their love for God through worship. What we do here on Sunday mornings we refer to worship. And yet, probably we all come here with different attitudes. Some come to feel better about themselves, some come to ask God to do things for them, and some come to connect with other people. But the Bible describes worship as a love response to what God continues to do in our lives and in the world. Worship is when we come to thank God for all He has done and to present ourselves before Him so He can examine us and prepare us to accomplish all the good works He has prepared for us in advance to accomplish. In other words, **WORSHIP IS HOW WE DEMONSTRATE OUR LOVE FOR GOD.**

II. RESPONDING IN PRAISE

In the next section, we are going to meet two more interesting people. From the ministry of these two in verses 25-38 we learn that responding in praise is an appropriate response to God's love for us. In other words, **PRAISE IS HOW WE DEMONSTRATE OUR THANKS TO GOD.** In verses 25-32 we see an old man expressing joy over God's faithfulness. Simeon is his name. The first time we come upon this name in the Bible is when Leah names her child Simeon. Her husband Jacob loved his second wife Rachel much more than he loved Leah. Leah was constantly trying to get Jacob's love. She thought that having baby boys would win his love. Here is the event where she names Simeon, her second child:

“33She soon became pregnant again and had another son. She named him Simeon, for she said, ‘The LORD heard that I was unloved and has given me another son’” (Genesis 29:33 / NLT).

The meaning of the name is that God has heard. Luke describes Simeon a righteous and devout. In other words, Simeon was in a very close relationship with God. His religion was authentic, not like the religious leaders we will meet later. This is encouraging to me. As messed up as religion was at this time with hypocritical leaders, corrupt priests, and corrupt politicians, we have already met two couples who truly loved and served God. One couple came from the priestly line, and the other from the Davidic line. One couple was fairly high on the social ladder, the other was just a blue collar middleclass culture. Now we encounter an old man who was interested only in serving God. He was an authentic believer. No matter how far modern day Christianity wanders from authentic Christianity, how corrupt churches become, no matter how entrenched they get politically, and no matter how corrupt government becomes, God will preserve a remnant of true believers that are interested in serving Him and Him alone.

Simeon was waiting for the consolation of Israel. The word for consolation is a Messianic word. In Greek it is *paraklēsis*. Literally, it means to be called alongside someone. In classical Greek it could be used to describe legal counsel. In the Hebrew context it means consolation, comfort,

or solace. It meant a comfort that brought about refreshment. The rabbis referred to the Messiah as the counselor of Israel. Remember, the prophet Isaiah referred to the coming Messiah as the Wonderful Counselor. And later Jesus would refer to the Holy Spirit by a form of this same word:

“26“But I will send you the Counselor—the Spirit of truth. He will come to you from the Father and will tell you all about me” (John 15:6 / NLT).

Simeon was waiting for the Wonderful Counselor to come to save Israel. God The Holy Spirit, Who would later be the Wonderful Counselor, revealed to him that he would not die before seeing the birth of Jesus. Not only that, the Holy Spirit led Simeon to the temple at the exact time Mary and Joseph were bringing Jesus to the temple. This is no coincidence. I want us to be fully aware of this. If we are genuine Christians, then God has given us His Holy Spirit. God the Holy Spirit lives in us. Our bodies are temples of God’s Holy Spirit. He leads us, teaches us, convicts us of sin, motivates us to do good works and empowers us to accomplish them. The Holy Spirit comforts us, helps us to understand God’s Word, and intercedes for us in prayer. There are no coincidences in our lives as well. God the Holy Spirit will bring us where God wants us to be.

Verses 28-32 record Simeon’s outburst of prayer. It is referred to as the Nunc Dimittis. It is the first words of the sentence that is translated, “Now let Your servant depart in peace.” In this prayer, he praises God for fulfilling His promise to him personally, to Israel, and to all humankind. Jesus came to the world as Israel’s Messiah, but His mission was to offer reconciliation between God and all people. God promised the redeemer back in the beginning of human history right after Adam and Eve sinned. The history of Israel was a march to the time Jesus would come and atone for the sin of humankind.

The word Simeon used for his dismissal meant release. The thought is almost like a soldier who had been guarding his post. When his replacement came, he was released from duty. Simeon faithfully waited and prayed for Israel’s Messiah. Not that Jesus arrived, Simeon was released from duty. He could now die in peace. I will get back to this concept of watchful prayer when we talk about Anna. But for now, when Simeon sees God promises fulfilled, he is filled with joy.

As we approach the end times, we Christians should rejoice when we start to suffer because we too know that our salvation is near. As the world becomes more and more anti-Christian and anti-Jewish, we should start watchfully praying for the return of Jesus to rescue us. We already have the Holy Spirit to guide us and comfort us.

When Jesus comes the second time, it will be joy for those who have been waiting for Him and living to serve Him, but there will be a great deal of pain for those who reject Him, and Christians will suffer as well as described in verses 33-35. As Simeon blurts out his praise, Mary and Joseph must have stood there with their mouths open because the text says they marveled at what Simeon said about their child. But then Simeon informs Mary that a sword will pierce her soul as well. Here is why at this time it is still confusing to Mary. The angel promised her she would give birth to Jesus Who would save His people. She had no idea the way He would have to accomplish this. No one had any idea that Jesus’ way to rescue humankind would be to hang on a cross. Mary would have to watch her Son be publicly humiliated, tortured, and executed.

She was expecting Him to be welcomed with open arms by Israel, especially the religious and political leaders of the Jews. Instead, they were the very ones who would reject Him. The expectation of having her Son revered and honored only to see the reality of His rejection must have made her suffering even greater.

Simeon makes it clear that some will receive Jesus as their Lord and Savior, while others will reject Him. The same goes on today. It seems as if society and the world in general have rejected Christ. However, I want to encourage us that just like in Jesus' day, the most unlikely people are ready to hear the Good News of Jesus' redemptive work. We must keep evangelizing our family, friends, and all unbelievers because God The Holy Spirit is still working and leading people to salvation. Most of you who know me, know that I believe that we Christians will go through a part of the Tribulation and that we will suffer for our faith. I can't see any other way for God to purify the church and separate true Christians from people who are Christian in name only. For example, we would see how many stand up for Christianity when the government is taking our names at the door of church when we come here on Sunday morning in order to arrest us. When Jesus comes for His church, there will be both joy and pain.

In verses 36-38 we see that it will also be a time of great praise. Here we meet an old woman named Anna. Her name means grace. By Luke's calculation, Anna is about 105-years-old. He identifies her as an Old Testament prophet. When Old Testament prophets spoke, they spoke the Word of God. In other words, they were the people who said, "Thus says the Lord," when instructing Israel. Other Old Testament female prophets are Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, Noadiah, and Isaiah's wife. In the New Testament, Philip's four daughters were New Testament prophets. Luke mentions women 43 times in his Gospel. Women were important to Luke's record of Jesus' ministry.

When she saw Jesus, she also recognized Him and left the temple praising God and telling people that God came to redeem Israel through this Child. She spoke to everyone about it.

Look at the last sentence in verse 37. She never left the temple. She constantly worshiped. She prayed and fasted. Some people think that because they are old or handicapped, or have some sort of disability, they can't serve God. I want to make a bold statement right here in public. If there were only 5 people here who fasted and prayed for Devon Church, we would explode in our ministry. I want to dare some of you who feel you cannot serve to start regularly fasting and praying for God to work in our church and I guarantee you won't believe what He will do here. God chooses to work through His people's prayers. Please commit yourselves to praying for the supernatural growth of our church. I'm hoping we have several Anna's in our church. Let's learn to praise God because **PRAISE IS HOW WE DEMONSTRATE OUR THANKS TO GOD.**

III. RESPONDING IN OBEDIENCE

I think that this next point is something that I have emphasized many times over the years. Verses 39-40 show us what responding in obedience looks like. **OBEDIENCE IS HOW WE DEMONSTRATE OUR LOYALTY TO GOD.** The goal of all Bible study and religious activities are nothing if they don't end up with obedience on our part. I really like the way James, the brother of Jesus put it:

“22And remember, it is a message to obey, not just to listen to. If you don’t obey, you are only fooling yourself. 23For if you just listen and don’t obey, it is like looking at your face in a mirror but doing nothing to improve your appearance. 24You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like” (James 1:22-24 / NLT).

As I said before, Luke compresses several events into one in order to move on with the story. In his Gospel, Matthew records the event of the Magi from the East visiting Jesus, Herod killing the babies in order to try and kill Jesus, the holy family’s flight to Egypt, and then subsequently traveling back to Nazareth. What we see in both Gospels is their obedience in parenting recorded here in verse 39. Mary and Joseph were careful to fulfill all their religious obligations and they made sure Jesus received all the instruction about His religious life. Even though we don’t see them actively teaching Jesus, we know they were godly people. I have stated this before, but the best parenting technique anyone can use is to live a godly life themselves. Listen to what God says through Moses in the Ten Commandments:

“5You must never worship or bow down to them, for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God who will not share your affection with any other god! I do not leave unpunished the sins of those who hate me, but I punish the children for the sins of their parents to the third and fourth generations. 6But I lavish my love on those who love me and obey my commands, even for a thousand generations” (Exodus 20:5-6 / NLT).

If we want to be godly parents who want to do the very best thing we can for our children, then it seems to me that if we live obedient lives to God, our children and grandchildren will be blessed because of our faith and our faithful obedience.

And then Luke describes the obedience in the maturing of Jesus in verse 40. Jesus was growing in wisdom and grace. Luke will only give us one more picture of Jesus in His youth. But for now, we have John the Baptist growing up and maturing in the Lord somewhere around Jerusalem in the wilderness, while Jesus is growing up and maturing in his faith up in Nazareth. Their lives and their ministries will connect again. But we really need to learn obedience. It is something that God expects of us. **OBEDIENCE IS HOW WE DEMONSTRATE OUR LOYALTY TO GOD.** Are there area of our lives in which we know we are disobeying God? We need to allow God the Holy Spirit point these areas out to us and we need to start obeying. God has done a mighty thing by saving us through the suffering and death of Jesus. He continues to do mighty things in and through us because He has sent His Holy Spirit to live in us. How should we respond to all this? **SINCE GOD CONTINUALLY DEMONSTRATES HIS LOVE FOR US, WE OUGHT TO RESPOND TO HIM WITH WORSHIP, PRAISE, AND OBEDIENCE.**

The prophetess Anna went away praising God and telling everyone about what God had done. An elderly woman once said to Charles Spurgeon, the great English preacher, “Ah, Mr. Spurgeon, if Jesus Christ does save me, He shall never hear the end of it.” I think that’s a great story. Is that the way you and I feel? Or have we lost the sense of joy and wonder of our salvation. God should never hear the end of our thankfulness. Like Anna, let’s continually praise God and tell everyone of His wonderful love.