

He's Here

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[0:00] We're starting a new thing, which is where we're going to pass Bibles around to help you see how beautiful the Word of God is. Not just because of the publisher, but seeing it in paper is just so much easier to follow as I fly around and jump around.

So I invite you to open up again to Luke chapter 2, verse 22. But maybe before I do that, just to reiterate, I don't know about you, but every week and every Christmas especially, I have this ongoing battle of just reminding myself why I'm here, what I'm doing here.

And Lord, have mercy on me that this never turns into a routine or something that I do. And then someone asks me, oh, why do you do that? And you're like, oh, I don't know. I just do it because that's what we do on a Sunday.

But to be able to come here and gather and to worship and to know who we worship is just a gift. It is just a gift that I don't ever, ever want to take for granted.

And that actually ties into next week as well. Actually, it ties into every week. Honestly, I think turning up 15 minutes late for Lord God Almighty is actually fairly rude anyway.

[1:14] So if you don't get to come in next week because we are too full, please forgive us. As we also seek to forgive you as well for not joining us on time.

Okay, so I say this as kindly and with much grace and truth as possible. If you want to come and if you want to bring friends, please, please, please come on time. Because when I come to your office and I come and visit you, I come on time.

And this isn't even my office. This is the dwelling place of God Most High. So let's just remember what that is, okay? Let's remember why we come in. Let's remember when we come in, this is what we're here for.

And maybe on that note, let's just spend a moment of silence now. I don't know what kind of heart you're coming in here with today. Whether you're just flustered. Whether actually you're like James, you don't even know. To get my family out of the house with the kids is rough.

And I'm here and I'm all flustered. So I hear you about the punctuality stuff, but we tried our best. I get it. So all grace, completely okay. Let's just spend a moment now and just to kind of settle our hearts.

[2:11] Whatever mindset we come in, let's just spend that time just going, Lord, we are here first and foremost for you. Lord, I'm reminded that if our favorite celebrity or sports person or hero or even boss or someone we revere, if they walked into this room, we would be filled with excitement, fear, and reverence.

So how much more so? King Jesus, as you come into this world, as we sing familiar Christmas songs, as we just engage in the usual Christian activity, how much more so should we be in reverence and awe of you?

Fill us with awe and wonder now, recognizing that you are right here, right now. Holy Spirit, we open our hearts and our ears and our minds to you.

Would you search our hearts? Would you test our thoughts? If there is any anxiety or anything that is offensive or prideful, we surrender to you.

Would you lead us on the way everlasting? In your name we pray. Amen. And that's the journey we've been on.

[3:59] We've been on, we're starting the book of Luke, and we're looking at this gospel and going, Holy Spirit, where are you working? If the Holy Spirit is God in the now, God on the move, then he's moving and working. And we're trying, at least these first few weeks, because it's Christmas, because it's Advent, we're looking at the Christmas story and go, actually, the main character here is actually the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit was the one that showed up in the form of Angel Gabriel, and starts intruding into Elizabeth and Zechariah's life and going, Hey, you're about to have a baby, and this baby's going to pave the way.

John the Baptist. And then he goes, he's having a busy day, and then he goes off to Mary, and then he does the same thing there and says, you're going to have a baby. And this baby comes, Luke chapter 1.

Even just those words should baffle you. Chapter 1, verse 35. The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the child to be born will be called Holy. The Son of God.

Mind-blowing. We take that for granted all the time. This will be called the Son of God, because the Holy Spirit himself comes upon Mary and brings this baby into this world.

[5:04] And then we see this interaction. This is last week. We see this interaction between Mary and Elizabeth, where they are just filled with the Holy Spirit. This Holy Spirit that banishes any jealousy, any comparison.

And Elizabeth is just filled with joy, even though she's been the one that has been waiting for a baby for years and years and years. And then this teenage Mary has her baby, and she's like, I am so overjoyed for you.

And I said, actually, how many of us would actually do that? When we see someone else have something happy happen in their lives, often, often the first thought is, but why is it not happening to me? Or comparing it to me, and it steals our joy.

That's what Theodore Roosevelt said. That comparison is the thief of joy. But we see the Holy Spirit comes and gives joy. And then we see the Holy Spirit comes and points you to other people.

There's a humility that comes when the Holy Spirit is here, because you're not thinking about yourself. Elizabeth is not thinking about herself. She's saying, the mother of my Lord is coming. Even though I'm about to give birth first, this one's more important.

[5:59] This one's more important. And then Mary, she could be saying, hey, I'm the real deal. This baby in here is going to be the savior of the world. I don't even have to try, and I have this baby.

But no, she's like, my soul magnifies the Lord, that he would come upon me on my humble estate. I don't deserve this, and yet I have this. How crazy about the generations ahead will call me blessed because of it.

So the Holy Spirit comes and gives joy. The Holy Spirit comes and points you to other people. And then it comes and gives you faith, and you see Mary sing this incredible song. You see Zechariah give this prophecy, not just about his son, but about Israel, about mankind.

So the Holy Spirit gives you faith, even when you have to go against the people in your life, even when you have to go against relatives. They said, Zechariah, why are we not calling your son Zechariah Jr.? That's what we do in our family.

That's what we do in this culture. He said, no, he's going to be called John. He gives you faith. And then finally, the Holy Spirit points you to Jesus. He says, actually, it's not even about my son.

[7:02] It's about the one who will come, who will shine the light into the darkness, who will walk the valley of the shadow of death and come out through it, and then will walk us through as well. The Holy Spirit points us to Jesus.

And now we're going to move. Now, chapter two begins with a very, very familiar story that we're actually not going to go through today, because next week we have lots of fun, chaotic activities that we've planned. And Gav's is laughing because he knows I'm not lying.

We're going to have lots of fun activities to kind of portray the shepherds and portray the wise men. So that'll be fun. And I know you know that. But we're going to move into a passage that I've actually never preached on, let alone I don't think it's often preached on at Christmas.

But you can kind of say it is still tied to the story, because it is tied to the story of baby Jesus. And we're going to see how the Holy Spirit moves in this passage. It's Luke chapter two, and we'll start from verse 22.

And as I unpack this verse by verse, I pray that you'll see, again, the goal in all of this, if you're like, why am I here? Why am I listening to you talk in these next few weeks? We're looking at how the Holy Spirit is working.

[8:02] We're being investigators, looking at this scripture and going, Holy Spirit, where are your fingerprints? What are you actually doing? What were you doing here through this Christmas story? Because so far, I hope it's established clear enough to you that actually the Holy Spirit has been the

one orchestrating this whole Christmas story.

And now we move into this passage, which I think is really interesting. And it starts here, verse 22. And 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.

As it is written in the law of the Lord, every male who first opens the womb shall be called the holy to the Lord and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, a pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons.

So shepherds, they're working. Boom, they see the angels and they go and find the baby in a manger. And then after this, Mary's just like, what is going on?

What on earth is going on? Why are shepherds who have no idea who we are? Why are kings and wise men who have no idea who we are? Why are they coming to us? Who really is this baby?

[9:05] And then, of course, they have to get on their way and they start and they have the first month. So Mary's and then at 40 days, she's finally let out of the house, much like the Chinese culture.

And what do they do in the Jewish tradition? They have to go to the temple because in those first 40 days, the mother who actually has just given birth is considered unclean. And so she has to go to the temple to do two things.

The first thing is basically the purification of mum. So actually, she has to come and basically after this act of going into the temple, she will come back and she will now no longer be ceremonially unclean.

And the second thing is to offer this firstborn. They offer this firstborn. Actually, they give a little bit of money as a symbol. And really, it reminds them of the Exodus. It reminds them of the Passover. It reminds them of as a people, as the Israelites, how they even got here in the first place, how they were delivered from the Egyptians.

So they do these two things. And then what's really interesting here is from this moment, we see the Holy Spirit come in. What do we see? We see a man named Simeon. Again, not often referred to in the Christmas story, I guess at this point in our world, it's January time now or early February.

[10:13] But what we see here is Simeon, verse 25. And Simeon and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel. And the Holy Spirit was upon him.

And so Luke here shows us again, the Holy Spirit's the one doing stuff. What's he doing? He talks about Simeon. Simeon, they think he worked in the temple. They think he was an old man, but actually nowhere does it say he's an old man.

But he's been waiting. And he's been waiting likely for a long time. And what's he been waiting for? The consolation of Israel. He's been waiting for Israel to be delivered from the oppression of the Romans.

And he's been waiting there. And he's a righteous and devout man, much like who? Who have we heard up until this point in chapter one, who is a righteous and devout man? Who has been, huh? Joseph. Joseph. Good. Who else? The very first one? Zechariah. You see these men who were just righteous and devout, who were just diligent in their way, waiting and waiting and waiting.

[11:10] And this is where the Holy Spirit comes. And maybe this is the first point I make. Because often, maybe now, maybe in the last few decades, we've seen a move in the charismatic movement in the church worldwide. We see people starting to talk a little bit more about the Holy Spirit, starting to talk about how the Holy Spirit works, how the Holy Spirit gives gifts, and how the Holy Spirit is even manifested in a church today.

And often, again, often we live in an increasingly polarizing world here, where it's either, you either go this way, and you acknowledge completely what the Holy Spirit is doing here, or you completely ignore it, and you go this way, and you go with tradition, and you go with all the liturgy, and you go with the word.

And I look at this, and I think, this is interesting. You see the Holy Spirit show up in tradition. You see the Holy Spirit show up in a temple with a man, with a righteous man who has been devout all this time, likely working in the temple, likely doing all the rituals.

The Holy Spirit comes and starts this whole process off here, because Mary and Joseph decided to follow the rituals of the Jewish people, handed down from the law of Moses. So you see, actually, the Holy Spirit does work in this place.

In summary, they taught me something. It was a quadrilateral invented by the guy John Wesley, and it's the Wesleyan quadrilateral, it's what it's called. And what it is saying is that actually all of our theology, which is everything, our approach to God itself, comes in the form of a quadrilateral. [12:35] So the first, basically, is four influences on how you approach God. The first one is Scripture. We know everything we know about God because of this book. And as evangelicals, this is the highest authority.

And then the second one is actually reason. So we start to know about God because of just how we compute. As a former science teacher myself, that's what I used to be able to teach my kids. I'm like, science tells you how things work, but faith tells you why they bother to work in the first place. If we are creations, then that points to a creator. And creations surely then have a purpose. And I kind of went on that route, and it was my reasoning, and Tim Keller has a book called *The Reason for God*, which really helps us talk about it in that way.

So you've got Scripture, you've got reason, and then you've got another one, which is tradition. So many people actually get to know God and everything about God through tradition, through rituals, through ceremonies, through services, through liturgy.

And then the final one is experience, which is the one where you actually feel God. And this is where the Holy Spirit maybe is a little bit more mentioned, a little bit more. And it's got this kind of, actually, you just feel the love of God.

[13:45] You sense the Holy Spirit is doing this. Have we met people who do that? You know, I felt the Holy Spirit was here, or he told me this and told me that. And so Wesley is saying there's these four quadrilaterals, and we've all come at it from different ones.

Just out of interest, let's see if you're still paying attention. What was the first one? Scripture.

Scripture. Brilliant. And the second one? Reason. Third one? Tradition.

And fourth one? Experience. Excellent. You know you're preaching to an Asian class. Okay, so out of interest, if you think about your own experience, your own theological method, if you will, which one have you been influenced by the most?

Put your hand up if it was reason. If you had to choose reason. Put your hand up if it was tradition. And if it was scripture.

And if it was experience. Did I just say that? Ah, interesting. Actually, there's more to unpack in this community and how that really works there.

[14:52] But just even there, we see that we all come to God from different perspectives. And what we see here then is actually the Holy Spirit shows up in tradition and in experience, and it's all the same.

And I find that is the message of Jesus. Hey, if you're on either end of this, hey, come in. I'm everywhere. I'm everywhere. I am in the tradition.

I am in the man who has been devout and righteous for many, many, many years, and I'm still showing up. And I'm also part of the one who's in the reasoning and in the experience and in the tradition and the community. And so we see him showing up here.

And it's interesting. And there is a waiting involved. You see Zechariah waiting for years. You see Simeon waiting for years. You see, if you go later into chapter 2, we'll talk about that. Anna, the prophetess, who implies that she was also very close to God.

Remember, prophecy is just knowing the heart and the word of God. And so you see Anna is this. And she was advanced in years. And she did not depart from, this is verse 37 in chapter 2. She did not depart from the temple worshipping with fasting, prayer, night and day.

[15:51] So she was waiting. There is something about the waiting that even in the beginning is so important. It tells me one thing. The Holy Spirit cannot be rushed. You cannot rush him to do things.

He waited for 400 years, complete silence, and then he shows up. There is a wait in the waiting. There is a wait in the waiting that actually is good.

I wonder what you've been waiting for. I wonder what the thing that you have been asking God for. Come on. It's time. You've told me I'll see this. And then year after year, it doesn't happen.

There is a wait in the waiting. We live in a world of a time of instant gratification. I was just reflecting with Christina the other day. I have lost the joy and interest in watching TV shows.

I grew up in a time, again, in the late 1900s, where you have your favorite show and you wait for it to watch it that once a week.

[16:52] And it's that one episode. Do you remember? Not if you remember that time. And you're like, oh, finally, it's the show. And you watch it. And then there's the you go. And then you wait for next week.

And then it just builds up again. Now I sit and I'm just like, I'm just scrolling through Apple TV or Netflix or Disney Plus. And I don't really know what to watch. And I watch a little bit. And I'm like, oh, that was kind of good. Halfway through. Now I'm going to skip. I'm going to move on to something else. In this time of instant gratification, I think it actually leads to dissatisfaction. I think it actually leads to, if you get it straight away, you don't actually even enjoy it that much. But you see here, these people waited for so long. And finally, finally it comes. Verse 26. So Simeon, good man, the Holy Spirit was upon him.

He was waiting for Israel to be delivered. And verse 36, we see the Holy Spirit doing two things. He reveals and he guides. First thing he says is, and it has been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

[17:54] You will not die, Simeon, until you actually see the Savior of the world. That's number one. And then, and he came into 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.

So the Spirit reveals to him that you will see Jesus before you die. And then he brings him into the temple. And so you can imagine, he's waiting every day, waiting for this. And then, of course, he gets to the point where actually baby Jesus comes in.

Of course, you've got Mary, and you've got Joseph, and you've got 40-day-old baby. So you've got Mary, who's sleep-deprived. You've got Joseph, who's sleep-deprived, walking into the temple, lucky to find their way into the temple.

And finally, Simeon sees baby, and he's like, this is it. And so we kind of guess that he worked in the temple because he took him up in his arms because, well, otherwise he's just a random guy. Why would he pick up the baby? So they're probably there for him to give him the baby. So you can imagine, and maybe I'm reading too much into this, or maybe I'm a bit too influenced by the recent movie Mufasa.

[18:59] So I can imagine him just picking up baby and then just lifting him up. We don't sing the song. And he's like, this is the baby.

This is it. I've been waiting all these years for this baby. And he does sing a song, which I won't try and sing, or at least he says a few words.

And he says this, verse 29 to 32. Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace. Now I can die. Now I can die. My life's purpose, I'm done.

It's accomplished. For my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.

Can you imagine? What's your moment where if I do this, I'm good to die? Okay. What's your moment? Can you think of one? Who can think of one?

[20:04] Who's avoiding eye contact with me? Brayden, do you have a moment where like, if I meet this person or do this, I'm good. Like, that's my life is... Sometimes?

Sometimes? I think mine's... If I met Michael Jordan, I think... I think my soul would be at peace. I would be crying. But it would be at peace.

Paul, do you have your moment? I think it's one. You can't... See a great white. See a great white shark.

Do you see those in Australia? I hear people encounter those. You can. Okay. So that's one of the big ones. I think we all, if we'd spent a bit more time and I don't put you on the spot, I think we all probably have one of those things.

In the back of our minds, at least. What we think our life wants or needs. And once we have that, we will check that box and we will, I'm good. This was Simeon's. He's like, I am so good.

[21:04] And what was his one? For my eyes have seen your salvation. Honestly, the reason why I ask is, hey, open the word together.

Let's do it together. Because if I'm doing that on my own and I'm just skimming through that and I'm just like, I was just Christian. He talked a little bit of devotion finished. Get on with the rest of my day. But if we open it up together and we see, for my eyes have seen your salvation.

He's looking at the baby. He's going, my eyes have seen your salvation. What does this tell me? Salvation is not a concept. It is not something that you can do to get.

It is not a set of laws that you need to abide by in order to be saved. Salvation is a person. Can you appreciate how mind-blowing this is for the people in the temple following all these rituals?

Thinking, okay, if I do this, this, this, and if my baby's 40 days old, I'll do this, and then mom will do this, and then maybe we will be saved, and maybe God will be pleased with us. He comes and says, this baby is the thing, is the reason you're going to be saved.

[22 : 12] Salvation is not a concept or set of tasks that you need to do. It is a person. It is a baby. And he is filled with joy. And then he says something else that is shocking, and he says this, that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples a life for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people, Israel.

What? We just heard that he'd been waiting years and years for the consolation of Israel, the Jewish people. They're the ones that need to be saved because they're the ones that are being oppressed. And yet suddenly in this moment that is filled with the Holy Spirit, filled with faith, he says, no, it's actually, it's more than that.

Guys, this gift that we thought would be for us is actually for the Gentiles. It's for everyone.

Everyone gets a chance at this. We're all sat here, recipients and beneficiaries of that.

But this gospel, this light is coming to the Gentiles as well for your glory to your people, Israel. And so you hear this and then actually you will do what the next part says, which is what Mary and Joseph, verse 33, and his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him.

At this point, I'm just like, if I'm Mary, I'm just, I don't even know how to compute all the things that have been said about my child. Bearing in mind, she's just had 40 days of looking after a newborn, which is probably one of the hardest tasks any human being can do, changing nappies, sleepless nights and all these things.

[23 : 40] And yet she just, in chapter one, she heard that this person, this person is verse 32. He will be great and will be called the son of the most high.

And the Lord God will give him to the throne of his father, David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever. And of his kingdom, there will be no end. What a prophecy for a baby. That this baby will be a king, will be great, and will have a kingdom that is forever and ever.

And then she'll have shepherds visiting her when the baby's born. And they'll say, the sky's filled up with angels singing this song about your son will bring peace to this earth.

And it says, after that, and she treasured all these things in her heart. She cherished all of them.

And there's no way she can't. There's no way she can forget these things. What does it mean?

My baby's going to bring peace on earth. On earth. And anyway, these first 40 days, it does not feel like peace with my baby. And yet somehow this is going to happen.

[24 : 42] And it makes me think, why did peace come? And it really brings me to the crux of today's message, which is, what is Christmas even all about? You look at the Christmas trees. You look at the fairy lights, which, by the way, have nothing to do with Christmas.

They're just fairy lights that make things look nice. But what is the Christmas message really about? You sing these Christmas carols. We sing these Christmas carols about there being joy. About there being faithful people who are coming.

But this baby is lying in a manger. What is the Christmas message truly about? Why does peace come on earth? The answer is because there was no peace at that time.

Why does peace have to come in the first place? It's because there was no peace. Does that make sense? I think we lose sight. I lose sight of that message in the Christmas story. Why is Christmas even necessary?

Because if everything was going well and there was peace in there, then maybe baby Jesus didn't even need to come. But baby comes because there wasn't peace, because the Israelites were being oppressed, because there was fighting going on all around the world.

[25 : 44] That is why. Have you ever thought about that? That Christmas was necessary because people were at war with each other and people were at war with God. And people were at war with creation.

What does the word peace even mean? Does anyone know from a biblical standpoint? Gabe, why don't we go with our resident theologian? What does the word peace mean in the Bible? And the word is?

Shalom. Wholeness. Harmony. A right relationship between people and God. A right relationship between people and people. And the right relationship between people and creation.

Christmas. Have you thought about that? Christmas was necessary because those things weren't in place. And so peace had to come and invade into this reality. And that was then. And you look at now and you look at the Middle East and you do not see peace.

You look and you see what's happening in Russia and Ukraine and you do not see peace. And you look around at the US and you do not see peace.

[26 : 51] Where do you see peace in this world? Other than maybe Finland and Sweden. And Switzerland, I guess. I guess Australia.

No, actually no. No. There is no peace. The next time we see a picture of a baby Jesus lying in a manger.

We have to remember that he came because there was no peace. And he came to bring peace on earth. What passage is that really pointing us to?

It's pointing us to Ephesians 2. Ephesians 2 is the part that really talks about. And I want you to turn there if you have your Bibles. Because I think this is an important part. The start of Ephesians 2 talks about the fact that we are all dead in the trespasses and of our sins.

That we have followed the course of this world. We have followed the desires of our flesh. And because of that, we are completely dead. And we are about to face wrath. And then verse 4.

[27 : 55] Ephesians 2 verse 4 has those famous two words. But God. We didn't have peace. We were at war with each other. We were at war between countries.

We were at war within the country. We are at war within our family. We are at war within ourselves. Romans 7 talks about the war that's happening inside you right now.

When you know what you should do, but you don't do it. And you know what you shouldn't do, and you still do it. And there is a war happening inside you. That is why baby Jesus came. But you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked following the course of this world.

Following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience. Among whom we all, we here, all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind.

And were by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind. If you want to ask, what's the reason for Christmas? That's it. If you were asked, hey, why do we celebrate Christmas at all? That's it.

[28 : 59] Because we were dead in the trespasses and sins, and we were following the course of this world. And we were disobedient. And we were at war with God. And we were at war with each other. And that's the reason for Christmas. And Jesus came to deliver that.

And you've noticed that I was just suddenly taking a very hard turn from a Christmas story. Because honestly, that little Simba moment that Simeon has, when he's so happy and says he can die now. There's another passage that he actually carries on talking. So he says that passage, that I can die now because I've seen salvation. It's a person. And then Mary and Joseph marvel at this.

And they're like, oh, that is so amazing. That is so cool that this baby is going to do this. We thought this would happen because we didn't plan to have this baby. So clearly something's going on. And then Simeon says something that actually is completely just off.

And he says, behold, verse 34. We're back in Luke now. Chapter 2, verse 34. And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother, behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel.

[30 : 06] And for a sign that is opposed and a sword will pierce through your own soul also. So that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed. That is the least Christmassy message, feel good message you can say about a baby.

He says, I can die now. I've seen salvation. This baby is going to save us, all of us. And then he says, oh, by the way, this baby has been appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel and for a sign that is opposed.

And a sword, mummy Mary, will pierce through your own soul too. That's confusing. What is he talking about there?

And it comes back to this point of peace. There was no peace. Let me establish that again. There was no peace. He came to bring peace. How does he come to bring peace? With a sword.

This baby, helpless, harmless, in a manger, ends up growing up. But the way he brings peace is with a sword.

[31 : 10] Matthew 10 talks about this. He says, I come with a sword. I hope this at least startles us. Because often Christmas is all about this kind of lovey-dovey.

Hey, he's come to give you love, hope, peace, and joy. Let's sing some songs. Let's have some mulled wine. And it's just, baby Jesus comes to bring peace with a sword that will pierce through our own souls.

What this says is this. This baby is going to come and he's going to cause the rise and the fall and the rise and the fall of many. What does that mean? That means that actually Jesus is the most polarizing character you will ever find in this world.

Tim Keller says this. You cannot respond moderately to the person of Jesus. It is impossible. You cannot. If I come and tell you, Eunice, that I am going to be your Lord.

Well, you would just laugh. But that's what Jesus is saying. Uday, I am your Lord. You will do what? No, you just shake your head. So you won't say, oh, that's kind of cool.

[32:17] Oh, that's cute. Let's sing a song about it. And then live completely different lives. When someone comes to say, I will be your Lord, saying, you will do everything that I say. That everything you have belongs to me.

Can you see how offensive the Christmas message truly is? He will cause the rise and fall of many. When I think what's happened, especially in our day and age, and actually in every day and age, is that we are simply mildly religious.

We are mildly religious in the sense that we kind of like the Christmas message. Only the warm, fuzzy parts, by the way, because they're the ones that make us feel nice. But the message of Christmas is like there is no peace.

And he comes to bring peace through a sword. We then have to make a decision and go, wait, wait, who are we? Do we submit or do we ignore?

Or do we stay in the middle and just be mildly religious? We cannot be in the middle, by the way. It doesn't work. Jesus says, I am your Lord.

[33:28] I deserve, I demand your all. And I can be trusted. And I am good. But I hope that stirs your heart.

Because as we're looking at this day, we need people who are not just mildly religious. There is no point. You are not good to anyone. Most of all, you are not good to yourself. If you are in that space where you are just comforted by the message of Christmas, you should be pierced to your heart, to your soul, as what Simeon says here.

And Mary will go through. He's prophesying the first point of suffering that is going to happen. This is the first moment he talks about suffering. Maybe you're going to have this baby and everything's been good so far. But let me tell you how he's going to get everything to be good.

It's going to start with pain. It's going to start with pain. And it's going to start with a sword. And what is that sword? What does that sword do? It reminds me of Pentecost in Acts chapter 2.

When Jesus leaves and he flies off into the sky. And suddenly they all start being filled with the Holy Spirit. And then Peter, who's the coward, who's the impulsive one, stands up and preaches this kerygma, this gospel.

[34:30] And then what happens when he preaches the gospel and the Holy Spirit's there? They are cut to the heart. Chapter 2, verse 37. They are cut to the heart and they repent. That's what Jesus is here to do.

That's what baby, cuddly, cute Jesus is here to do. Call you to repentance. And the Holy Spirit is the one who is working in order to pierce the very depths of our souls.

The question is, will we respond in such a way? Tim Keller again says this, God's peace always comes with a sword. Peace comes after the sting of repentance.

Peace comes after the sting of repentance. Peace or God's peace is kind of like an antiseptic. It'll hurt first before it heals.

It'll hurt first before it heals. So this sword he comes is not the sword of a warrior, but it's the sword of a surgeon. Cuban, this time last week you were in the hospital and you had to be operated on with a very sharp utensil that no doubt would have caused a lot of pain.

[35:38] But our pain was necessary to get out the thing that needed to be going out because your body was at war with itself. And so the surgeon comes and operates.

There's pain and there is pain and there is waiting, but then there is healing. Brothers and sisters, that's the Christmas message.

That we had no peace in this world, that we still do not have peace, but there was a baby that came. And this baby causes the rise and fall of many. You cannot stay in the middle.

You cannot hedge your bets. You cannot stay on the fence. You have to choose. Is he your Lord? Is he Lord of all? Or is he not at all? You have to decide.

C.S. Lewis says, this only way for you to get peace is to pass through the pain of repentance and exposure. There's no way to get into that peace without going through pain. Ephesians 2, the second half of it is much more joyous.

[36 : 39] And maybe we'll finish there. So if we can turn back to Ephesians 2. We've just said, Paul's just said that you are dead in your trespasses and sins. You are about to face God's wrath. And then the second half brings a lot of joy.

Verse 12, we'll go from there. Ephesians 2, verse 12. Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise. This is the key word if you want to summarize it up.

Having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus, you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility.

Remember, at that point, the Jews were oppressed by the Romans, but they also felt as though they were the chosen people. And so they were also at war with the Gentiles. And what Paul's saying here is, baby Jesus came and broke that dividing wall of hostility down.

How did he break down that wall with a sword? How did he break down the wall between us and God through the cross? He breaks down that wall so that we now all here, Gentile or Jew or anyone, all peoples, we all now have access to the Father through Jesus.

[37 : 52] We were once dead, but God. We were once at war. But Jesus, he himself is our peace.

So what does that mean for you? Put yourself in the temple for a second. Put yourself in the temple. You're not Simeon. You're not Anna.

You're just someone who's been going there day by day, trying to figure out, Lord, what is this whole life about? Why am I here? Why is there still so much suffering in my family?

Why is there so much suffering in my people? And you're just waiting. And suddenly you see this family come in and you see this baby. And you see Simeon lift him up and say, my eyes have seen salvation.

And then you hear him say, this baby is going to be the cause of the rise and fall for many, and it will pierce your soul. What does that mean for us?

[39 : 02] That means the only point of application here that I have for us is that, just like Simeon, would we cast our eyes on that baby Jesus too?

Because there is something there. You've grown up thinking that actually all you need to do to attain salvation is to attend church. To attain salvation and to appease your mother and your grandmother.

And you come to church. You've always thought that in order to get into heaven, you just need to be a good person. Or maybe you've even just given up waiting.

And you're like, you know what? This waiting is taking too long. I've been waiting for that spouse for years and it's still not come. I'm just going to go and go about it my own way. I'm going to figure this out myself. I've been waiting for that child for too long.

I'm just going to go and figure it out myself. I've just been waiting for that career and the money I want and the power I want for too long. I'm just going to go and figure this out myself. Be like Simeon.

[40 : 03] Be like Zechariah. Be like Anna. Wait. And turn your eyes to the baby Jesus. Turn your eyes to the one who comes in the most humble form.

Let us not get confused. He also comes with a sword. He comes with a sword to break down the dividing walls of hostility between us, between us and God, within ourselves.

To bring us what? Shalom. To bring us wholeness. To bring us harmony. Let us be cut to the heart. Can you see what the Holy Spirit's been doing? This whole interaction. Whether he reveals to Simeon. Whether he guides him into the temple. Whether he gives him these words to say.

Whether he cuts to the heart.

Would we submit to what he is doing right here? Let us ask ourselves today. And we will spend the last few minutes. And I will invite the worship team to come back up as well. What is the Holy Spirit doing in you?

[41:14] Is he revealing something? Is he guiding you to somewhere? Or is he cutting you to the depths of your heart? Not to hurt you.

Not to inflict pain. Just for pain's sake. But to bring healing. But to bring restoration. But to bring peace.

To a weary soul. To a conflicted soul. That is what the Holy Spirit is here to do. And that's what Jesus came for.

I'll just spend a moment now just to reflect. Father, as we look at this. The Christmas story. And as we've spent these last few weeks here.

We see. Where there is Zechariah and Elizabeth. Mary and Joseph. The shepherds. The wise men.

[42:17] Simeon and Anna. Everything. Everyone. Point to the coming of the Savior of the world.

This baby in a manger. Seemingly helpless.

Helpless. But we submit to him.

We surrender to him. Knowing that he came to bring peace. And he comes to bring peace. Because he himself is peace. And so we repent.

Of anything in us. Among us. Between us. That is a war.

[43:31] And we open ourselves and we subject ourselves willingly. To your sword. Knowing that you will bring healing. We know that your peace comes.

Through the sting of repentance. So Holy Spirit, would you do your work?

Just as you were doing those 2,000 years ago. Amongst all those people. Would you do it in us again?

Would you do it in us again? Would you do it in us again?