

One of the most polarising persons in history, is our Lord Jesus Christ.

As disciples of Jesus:

- we love Him with every fibre of our being;
- We live for Him;
- We long for Him; and
- we long for His coming.

But also, at the Name of Jesus, some are filled with hatred and bitterness and gall. And some will pour out their disdain and mock and ridicule disciples of Jesus...

Others,,,, feel they remain neutral, because they're not for Him and they're not against Him – He just means nothing to them...

But the thing is, “One cannot remain neutral towards Jesus.” And how we respond to Jesus, reveals the condition of our heart.

We've just begun our new series on the Gospel of Luke. And today's Bible Reading continues the introduction to the Gospel. Up until this point, it's been about:

- the birth of John the Baptist;
- the birth of Jesus;
- the shepherds have come and worshipped Him at the nativity, and they've just left...

And the very next scene, is introducing to us, the Godliness/devoutness/piousness of Jesus' parents, and how they did **everything** that was required by the Law...

Some Christians turn their nose up at those who are devout – do you know what I mean by being devout/pious? It means worshipping God and serving God, takes **first** place in their life. And so, a **devout** person:

- prays often;
- delights in reading God's word;
- lives righteously because they know our Heavenly Father wants His children to walk in His ways (obedience);
- doesn't skip church because they had a late night the night before, or because they're a bit busy.

To worship God is their priority.

Now, some people turn their nose up at a devout person or a pious person – they see it as empty religion, and maybe for some it might be – some may go through empty religious motions, because they're trying to make God happy, without having a true faith in our living Jesus (which is what God is really looking for)...

But what jumps out at me in this passage, is the way God does His work, and the way that God speaks through those who are devoted to Him / devout & Godly & pious...

Joseph and Mary, did everything required by the law. There's 3 separate religious ceremonies here, that were required by the law.

The first was circumcision. Circumcision, was the mark of belonging to God's chosen people of Israel. The Covenant that God made with Abraham, required every male to be circumcised. And it was written down in the law, that when a male infant is 8 days old, that was the day to do it.

Now, that was the Old Covenant. Jesus was born under the Law of the Old Covenant, to redeem those who are under the Law.... We now live under the New Covenant, so if you are a male and you're not circumcised, don't fret – that just means that you're not a Jew.

The 2nd ceremony, could happen any time 40 days after giving birth, and that was the sacrifice for purification. Giving birth is a messy business, and it takes a while for things to all be working again, and so for cleanliness reasons, for 40 days (after giving birth), you couldn't come to the temple.

And so, after the 40 days, Joseph and Mary made the journey to Jerusalem for their purification.

Now, something we learn here, is Jesus was born into a poor family. The required sacrifice for purification, was a lamb (as a burnt offering), **and** a pigeon or a turtledove (as a sin offering). But for the poor, who couldn't afford a lamb for the burnt offering, they could bring 2 pigeons or 2 turtledoves (one for the burnt offering, and one for the sin offering).

Leviticus 12:8And the priest shall make atonement for her, and she shall be clean.

The 3rd ceremony, was the dedication, where the firstborn would be presented before God.

We know, that the Lord provides for His people. You've experienced that haven't you? The Lord provides for you. And an abiding principle, is that God's people, give unto God, the firstfruits... We don't give to God the left-overs – we don't give to Him what we feel we can afford, after we've satisfied all of our other expenses and savings and loans.

We give to God the first and the best.

And an example of this, is found in Exodus 13, where every firstborn male belonged to God.

Exodus 13:12 (ESV)

¹² you shall set apart to the LORD all that first opens the womb. All the firstborn of your animals that are males shall be the LORD's.

And even a firstborn male son, has to be redeemed. A firstborn son belongs to God, but of course, we're not going to sacrifice our children, and so the Law proscribed a fee for redemption (5 shekels in silver). Which this week would be worth about \$58.

But why? Why did the firstborn belong to the Lord? It's a reminder of God's salvation and how God brought His people out of Egypt.

Exodus 13:14-16 (ESV)

¹⁴ And when in time to come your son asks you, 'What does this mean?' you shall say to him, 'By a strong hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery. ¹⁵ For when Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the LORD killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of animals. Therefore I sacrifice to the LORD all the males that first open the womb, but all the firstborn of my sons I redeem.'

It was to be a reminder of how the Lord brought his people out of Egypt.

BTW, as it turns out, Mary & Joseph probably didn't need to pay the 5 shekels to redeem Jesus as the firstborn..., because Jesus the firstborn of God, was sacrificed...

Anyway, the point is, that right from His birth, Jesus was enveloped into a Godly, devout and pious family. They did everything required by the Religious Law.

And there at the temple (as they're doing this), we meet another Godly and devout man (Simeon is his name). And we're told 3 things about Simeon. He was:

- righteous; and
- devout; and
- the Holy Spirit was upon Him.

Now, when the Bible describes a person as “righteous”, that does **not** mean that they just do the right thing; and don’t break the law; and don’t upset too many people... To be righteous, is to demonstrate the very character of God. And Simeon was righteous.

And he was devout. God-fearing/devoted to God.

And the Holy Spirit was upon Him.

....

Before the ascension of Jesus, it was rare event, for the Holy Spirit to come upon anyone. As we read the Old Testament, we see the Holy Spirit would come upon a person for a specific purpose, at a specific time... But things are very different for us now. As Christians, we are filled with the Holy Spirit...

If you have given your heart to Jesus, and been saved by the blood of Jesus, and received forgiveness in His name, – when sin is kicked out, the Lord moves in. And the Holy Spirit lives in our hearts... As Jesus said:

Luke 11:13 (ESV)¹³ If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

And so, we can be filled with the Holy Spirit – we just have to pray and ask...

But sometimes, we may **not** feel that the Holy Spirit **is** upon us. And we crave the Holy Spirit to be upon us, don't we???

And some will try to remedy it by *“We've just got to have the right atmosphere and the spirit will come”* *We've gotta have the right music; a nice band; the right mood lighting; maybe accented with a mist generated by a smoke machine to give that Holy Spirit atmosphere...*

You know what? As I read the New Testament, it's got nothing to do with aesthetics or having the right mood/lighting... The Holy Spirit comes upon the God-fearing and the righteous / those devoted to God...

I think of Cornelius, who's described as “a devout man” “who feared God”, and he gave generously to those in need, and he was a man of prayer. And this was before he knew Jesus... And Cornelius was praying, and an angel appeared to him, and said “Send for Peter at such-&-such-a place...

And Peter came, and Peter preached the Gospel. And while he was still preaching, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word...

And time and time again, it's the same – the Holy Spirit comes upon those:

- whose hearts are surrendered to God;
- who are God-fearing;
- devout;
- righteous before Him...

That's when the Holy Spirit comes in power.

You see, we fully experience the power of God, when all else fades, and when the Lord Jesus Christ is lifted up to where He rightly belongs (lord and master)... It's when we surrender ourselves and our hopes and dreams and plans, totally to Him.

Let's never settle for a 2nd-rate "spiritual feeling" mood that's generated by sights and sounds – Let's never settle for that, and miss out on a genuine experience of the Spirit of God, that comes with devotion and prayer and righteousness.

And so Simeon was righteous and devout, and the Holy Spirit was upon Him.

And we're told, "He was waiting for the consolation of Israel"... That means, Simeon was waiting for the Messiah, and the salvation that the Christ would bring.

And the Lord had revealed to Simeon, that before he died, he would get to see Him with his own eyes....

And the day that Jesus' parents presented Jesus in the temple, that promise was fulfilled. He took Jesus in his arms, and he praised God...

**Now I can die in peace.
My eyes have seen Your salvation.**

It's like Simeon's whole life of devotion to God, had been fulfilled... He'd been living righteously/devout in His service

of God... But there was something missing, and his life was fulfilled with the coming of the messiah.

And you know, many people today try to fill their life up with good works; do good things; devoted to various causes.... but there's something missing. And what's missing, is the salvation of God through the Lord Jesus Christ....

Anyway, let's come back to what Simeon said:

³⁰ my eyes have seen your salvation

³¹ that you have prepared in the presence of all
peoples,

³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and for glory to your people Israel."

The Gospel of our Lord Jesus, is not something which is hidden. It's been prepared in the presence of all peoples (Jew & Gentile alike). It's a light for the Gentiles... I thank God for this, because if it wasn't, most of us would miss out. A Gentile was not allowed in the temple of God, but in Christ Jesus, God comes to live in us.

And the salvation of God through the Lord Jesus Christ, is for glory to the people of Israel... Sadly, most of them missed it. You see, what makes Israel special, is God's salvation comes through Israel.

Now, we're told that Joseph and Mary marvelled at this... I mean, it's just building, one thing on top of another, isn't it...

They'd been visited by angels/shepherds, and now by the Spirit of God, they were hearing prophecy about their Son... By now, they might have an inkling that there's something special about Jesus...

And Simeon blessed them, but it was a blessing with a sting. "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed³⁵ (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."

As Simeon held this dear baby boy, Simeon knew there would be a time when Mary would see her Son (the light for the Gentiles; The glory of Israel), suffering and dying, because He was a sign from God that will be opposed...

Do you understand now, why I began the message as I did??? When it comes to Jesus, we cannot remain neutral. Jesus is the most polarising figure in history. And how we respond to Him, reveals the condition of our heart.

And so, even in these opening pages of the Gospel, only a babe in arms, but Jesus, in His life and ministry, He has the shadow of the cross before Him...

And at this point, enters a very old lady (known as Anna), who was a prophetess. She'd been a widow (either for 84 years),

or possibly until she was 84. She was married for 7 years, and so she could be 106 or more years old...

And she was always at the Temple, worshipping with fasting and prayer night and day. And she also told everyone about Jesus – All who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

I thank God for His devout widows like Anna – who worship and fast and pray...

Both Simeon and Anna, lived good, but unfulfilled lives... They lived in hope, and their fulfillment – everything they'd hoped for and prayed for, was found in Jesus Christ...

Their devotion to God, was looking forward to the coming of the Saviour.

Our devotion to God, is because our Saviour **has** come, and we now look forward to His return...

What comes through to me here, is how the Spirit of God comes upon those who are devout and righteous, and are eagerly waiting for their Lord.

And my prayer, is:

- that we together, would be a church, who are devout
- that we would be a people who find our fulfillment in the Lord Jesus Christ
- and who eagerly await His return.

- That we would be a people of prayer and praise and worship.

Let's pray:

Heavenly Father,
we give You praise for the coming of Your Son.

The Light for the gentiles;
the glory of Israel...

The figure in history, whom many oppose.

But for us, He is the fulfillment;
He is our salvation;
He is our hope;
And our Joy.

Lord, by Your Holy Spirit,
make us a people of prayer;
and praise;
and worship;
A people devoted to You,
Because You are our everything.

in Jesus' Name,
Amen.