

Sermon: Split Pea Soup

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Introduction: We've had an exciting weekend! The Christ was born and now so much will happen. What's going to happen? Luke, in chapter 2 (page ??? in the pew bible), records a story in his gospel that is not included in the other gospels. Jesus, after His birth is taken to the temple for his consecration in Jerusalem about a week later. This is roughly 5 miles away from Bethlehem. Please turn with me to Luke 2. Listen for the Word of the Lord:

Luke 2: 25-35: Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, 'Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.' And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, 'This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.'

Leader: This is the Word of the Lord. People: Thanks be to God.

Our exposition today revolves around Simeon's blessing of the baby Christ. He says 3 major ideas that I think apply to us today.

The first is that the Christ causes division.

- I. The Christ Causes Division.

Simeon says that Jesus is destined for the falling and rising of many. The irony exists that Simeon looked forward to the consolation of Israel, or the reconciliation of the Jews

with God. And yet, Jesus will cause many to fall and many to rise. “The one who would bring salvation would also bring judgment; the cornerstone would be the stone of stumbling for others. Falling and rising, therefore, refer to two different groups, not to a sequence of falling and then rising. This oracle makes much the same point as Jesus’ warning that he had not come to bring peace but division (Lk 12:51-53).” (NIB Commentary). “In vivid language Simeon predicts that because of the child ‘many in Israel’ would be brought to moral decision, some to a point of collapse and others to what can well be called a resurrection.” (Expositor’s Bible Commentary). So who will rise and who will fall? The obvious answer is that those who accept Christ will rise and those that reject Him will fall. But there exists hypocrisy on both sides. So let’s talk about the symptoms.

a. The Humble will Rise.

We all love stories of individuals rising from humble beginnings because it speaks to this truth. Rocky Balboa, Cinderella, American Idol, and who can forget the subway scene about Chris Gardner in Pursuit of Happiness.

Pursuit of Happiness <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dLwjEtY4uas>

We’ve heard this theme before. The last will be first and the first will be last. Whomever, wants to be first must be the servant of all, just as Jesus showed us. How is that going for us? Do we need a pulse check? What does humility look like in the work place, in the home, in the marketplace, in the church? Does humility mean to refuse a compliment and batter ourselves? Or does humility look like a one who serves when no one is looking? Are we modeling humility for our children? Are we modeling humility for our parents?

b. The Proud will Fall.

The problem in the Christian community is that we become good actors when others are looking. Those of us who lead in the spiritual community are in special danger of putting on a show and falling from genuineness. We need to remain constant in reminding ourselves how hard Jesus was on the spiritual leaders, the Pharisees. As for the rest of us, we all face the temptation to be better than the next person. Our experience, knowledge, gifts, appearance, abilities, tempt us to stand out. But as this passage reminds us, the tallest blade of grass is the first to be cut by the lawn mower. When we do what we do best, do we trash talk? Do we strut our stuff? What values do we compromise to rise above the rest?

Last week, Melissa and I were discussing the contents of one of the Christmas gifts under the tree from my mother. I guessed that it was a gift card wrapped in a box. Melissa guessed that it was DVD. When opened, we discovered the gift card. I gloated, “I was right, you were wrong”. Evan scolded me. He said that we can’t say that, because if we say, “I was right, you were wrong” then no one will want to play with us.

The second part of Simeon’s oracle suggests that Jesus will be rejected.

II. The Savior Causes Rejection.

Jesus will be a sign that will be opposed. Simeon predicts Jesus’ rejection and the rejection of those who follow Him.

a. Christ will be Rejected.

His parents will soon know when they are persuaded by an angel to flee to Egypt because the King wants to kill the infant. Not only is Jesus immediately rejected in His infancy, but also to the death 33 years later. **As the one who himself is the ultimate sign, the visible affirmation of God's declared intentions, he will be vulnerable to the hostility of unbelievers. A negative attitude toward him, however, serves to brand the unbeliever as one who has rejected not only him but the whole of God's revelation. Jesus will be rejected by his own people.** We have to realize, too, that Christianity is rejected, too. History portrays the early church as being persecuted and scattered. As the Christ was rejected, so are His followers. Even today, more Christians around the world are being persecuted.

According to a statistic on ChristiansinCrisis.net, 43,000,000 Christians have become martyrs since the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ 2000 years ago. Over 50% of these were in the last century alone. More than 200 million Christians face persecution each day 60% are children. Every day over 300 are killed for their faith in Jesus Christ. (Source ChristiansinCrisis.net)

In religiously free countries, like this one, nativity scenes are being removed and banned in public places. Our culture is growing more secular every day.

b. We will be Accepted.

However, there is a flipside to this coin. By His rejection, we are accepted. This is one of the most fundamental joys of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We are accepted into the family of God. Notice the inclusion of Gentiles in Simeon's oracle, "a light for revelation to the Gentiles." We are accepted by the infant, by the king, by our Lord and our God. Acceptance is such a valuable commodity. Ask any teenager. The desire and longing to be accepted will push many young people to do outrageous things, like join gangs, or be initiated into a social organization, etc. Even as adults, we hide the desire to be accepted and liked by others.

This last part is actually in a different order in the Greek text. It says that Mary's soul will be pierced and the thoughts of many will be revealed.

III. The Sword Pierces Your Soul.

This is perhaps my favorite part of the oracle. "A sword will pierce your own soul." No doubt this is in direct correlation for the pain Mary will feel as her messianic son will be killed and mocked and ridiculed. Whenever injustice occurs for your child, you feel their pain almost more than they do.

Passion – Mary's Pain

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0i-wupPJZIk>

However, the Word of God, or truth, is referred to as the Sword in Ephesians. Therefore, Simeon's oracle gives light to the common split in the woman's soul brought about by the piercing by the truth. We, in the biz, refer to this as the redeemed sinful nature. Paul describes this phenomenon when he admits his ongoing personal failure, "What I hate, this I keep on doing." William mentioned this on Christmas Eve. How can we be redeemed if we keep sinning? How can we be saints, and yet sinners in the same moment? This split soul condition is a common well-publicized occurrence, even in the modern media.



Spiderman 3 deals with the greatest villain of all – himself. Or innocent Niki Sander’s split personality portraying her alter ego as Jessica, if you’re a Heroes Fan. But perhaps the most in-depth portrayed of the sinful nature is depicted in the Lord of the Rings character of Gollum/Sméagol.

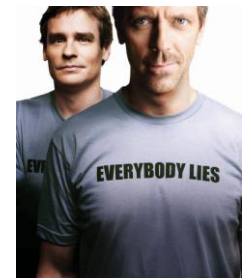
We are corrupt. Our enemy is our sinful nature. We are all capable of the worst imaginable things. Do not underestimate the power of our sinful nature. Pride seems to blind us from the truth about ourselves making us think we are better than we really are. So how can we tell just how morally corrupt we are? A crisis is a good barometer.



For you House fans, one of the tragic and honest flaws of Dr. House is his addiction to pain meds, but his well-known quote “Everybody Lies” is applied to himself. He does not underestimate the power of his own mind when he checks himself into a psych ward because he realizes that he is tricking even himself.

a. Crisis brings Transparency

So if we can barely know ourselves, and are more than adequate actors, even convincing our family, spouse, and ourselves, then how do we know who we are? Are we the redeemed? Or are we the sinful? I am a big believer in the power of the crisis. It is the crisis that a window is opened into our soul. It is through a crisis, that we show our true colors. It is in crisis that we reveal heroism. It is in crisis that we reveal monstrosities. You can see a window into the soul of a person when they are cheated on a ball field, or been misrepresented in court, or accused of something they didn’t do. Their reaction will often reveal their heart.



Solomon had a way of doing that to people to judge the truth. Remember when he told the two mothers fighting over a baby to split the child in half? The real mother begged for the child’s life even to give it up to the other mother. Solomon created a crisis to reveal the authentic mother from the false one.

There is a movie that states such an amazing truth that I shall share it with you. A character says, “You never really know a person until you fight with them.” I will leave you to guess which movie this line came from. But don’t you agree?

b. Christ brings Prosperity

Just as crisis brings transparency, the Christ brings prosperity. As a community of believers, we put on the persona of SPLIT PEA SOUP, all of our halves mingling together. We will experience each others’ redeemed halves and sinful halves. It is through our experience with each others’ redeemed halves that Jesus gives us a glimpse of the kingdom.

Even though we inevitably prove who we are in a crisis, we have an out. Despite our personal failures, cowardness, constant disobedience, character flaws, we have a God that recognizes our shortcomings and pays for our blemishes. We have a savior born this week, who overcomes our flaws and triumphs in our place. Jesus Christ offers you and me a place in His kingdom. Don’t abuse your forgiveness as permission to sin, but don’t wallow in guilt either. We experience through Christ a kingdom that is now and not yet. Will you respond to what He has done?