

# Jesus presented at the temple

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Hello, am I on? That's good. My name is Graeme, I'm one of the, a member of the church here. I have quite a lot of Grahams in the church, but I'm the guy up the front this morning anyway.

So, we're actually kind of going to pick up from last week. We had Luke, who was describing a shipwreck in great detail.

And now we're going back 50 or 60 years, and we're going to look at Luke telling us about the birth of Jesus. So, it's the same Luke, and he's also a detail man.

We're going to talk about one of the stories that happened just about a month after Jesus was born, when Jesus was presented at the temple. So, that's my brief for this morning.

But please hold something Jason said about pressing in. Hold that word. Hold that word, because we might come back to it. So, first off, in fact, I'm going to ask Helen to come up and actually read the reading.

[ 1 : 0 5 ] While she does, this is a model of the temple. I'm ringing a bit. A temple as it was before it was flattened by the Romans. At the time of Jesus, this is actually a model in the museum in Jerusalem nowadays.

So, it's quite a big building, as you can see, from the size of the doors. And what is probably going to happen in this story, or what probably happened, I should say, is Mary and Joseph turned up, and they were coming to the temple for several reasons.

One is they had to present sort of a purity offering, which was a couple of pigeons, because they were poor. And the other reason was they have to dedicate Jesus to God by giving him to the temple.

That was what you did with the firstborn. In fact, the normal practice was to pay a bit of money so you could take your baby home again. So, they were coming for a couple of reasons.

And they probably turned up in the outer courts there, where they would have been buying and selling of pigeons and sheep and so on for this very purpose. And then the sort of castle-like block in the middle there, you see, it's got a front section.

[ 2 : 1 7 ] That's the temple of four women. Only Jews were allowed in that block, and women were allowed in the first block. And if you were a priest, you could go, or a man, you could go into the second block.

And the higher block there is the Holy of Holies. So, these, Mary and Joseph would have come, they would have got their pigeons. The events we're about to read will probably have happened in the temple of women there, as front there, when they met two characters.

And then they would have given their pigeons to the priest, who would have taken them through to the back, and sacrificed them. So, while Helen's reading, think about that. I also would just...

Oh, I disappeared. I disappeared. I also would just say, at one point I wanted to make here, was that this is probably a lot of Mary's reminiscences given to Luke.

So, this is kind of the voice of Mary herself. I'm reading from Luke 2, 22-39. When the time came for the purification rites required by the law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord, as it is written in the law of the Lord.

[ 3 : 32 ] Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord, and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the law of the Lord, a pair of doves or two pigeons.

Now, there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him.

It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts.

When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace.

For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of your people Israel.

[ 4 : 39 ] The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother, This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed, and a sword will pierce your own soul too.

There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old. She had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was 84.

She never left the temple, but worshipped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. Thank you, Helen.

Okay, so that's the story. I'm going to try and pull a couple of things out of it, because there's a lot in there. The first thing that I wanted to talk about is this, that these people...

[ 6 : 08 ] In the chapter before, I should say, we hear about Zechariah and Elizabeth, and then we hear about Mary and Joseph, and they're all people who are described as devoted, Zechariah in particular.

Mary, who suddenly finds herself with child, her life could have been completely wrecked. But in fact, she says, I am the Lord's servant. She must have been a woman of great, you know, close to God.

We don't know much about her, but clearly from that response, she was a very devoted woman. And then when we look at this story that we've just read, Helen just read, Mary and Joseph, the first thing they're doing is they're following the law.

They're being devout. They're going to the temple at the right time, with the right things, and they're doing it correctly. So that's the first thing that strikes me. Then you look at Simeon and Anna, the two characters who were met in there, and it's just been read about.

They're also described as people who are devout. They're worshipping, they're righteous, they're fasting, and they're praying. And Luke kind of makes a point of this.

[ 7 : 17 ] These are devout people. And, you know, God delights, as I put it here, God delights to work through devoted people.

That's the first thing I'd like to say. God delights in those who are devoted to him. Whether you understood the detail or not, they followed it through correctly. But they were also people who were worshippers, righteous, fasting, and praying.

So what is devotion? Well, pressing in is probably what was said earlier. But it's not about beating yourself up. It's about applying some self-discipline, setting aside time and effort, being focused on worship, giving your heart and mind to being righteous, that is daily living before God, to fasting.

You can see I'm not very good at fasting. I struggle with it. I really struggle with it. And praying. We can be devoted to all those things.

We can discipline ourselves. We can press in despite what's going on. And we should also be careful to guard our hearts and minds. You know, what are we watching?

[ 8 : 37 ] What are we spending time on? Those kind of things. There's some discipline here. Now, immediately, I'm going to tell you a quick story because it's important. Your devotion must come from love of God, gratitude for your salvation.

Yeah? And a desire to please God. That's why we should be devoted. Not an attempt to sort of earn heaven or some specific reward. Martin Luther, 500 years ago, one of the leaders of the Reformation, he's just a name to you, but he was a real man and he struggled in his early life.

He was a monk and he was absolutely devoted to God. He prayed the whole time. He fasted. He studied. He did loads and loads because he was trying to earn favour with this God who he thought was a judgmental God and harsh.

And he really struggled with it. He struggled with it. And then suddenly, he was reading his Romans, the book of Romans, and he realised, he realised that he didn't have to struggle anymore because he put his faith in Jesus Christ who had given him salvation.

So he became, in that sense, born again. He wouldn't have used those terms. But he realised that it was God who had given him his salvation. Now, he became, after that, a very energetic and devoted man.

[ 9 : 54 ] He preached and he did lots of study and he did lots of teaching about how to find salvation. So he was still a devoted man. But the important distinction is you can be devoted for the wrong reasons.

You can be devoted to try and please God. No, we're devoted in response to God. So, am I living a devoted life?

I ask myself that question. Am I devoted in the right sense of the word? We could talk about worship, daily living, fasting or praying.

We'd be here all day. So what I've done, I've just picked one and I thought, let's look at prayer. What does devotion, pressing in, if you like, look like in terms of prayer?

So, I went to the scriptures. Not too difficult. And I looked up some, where it talks about praying, in particular, about pressing in in a devoted way.

[ 11 : 01 ] So it says, in Thessalonians, rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances. that's quite strong, isn't it?

This is a standard, if you like, of devoted prayer, that we should be always praying, rejoicing. Jason earlier, he had a bad situation.

Give thanks in all circumstances. That's really hard sometimes, isn't it? Something's gone wrong. Thank you, Father. There's a bit of discipline required, yeah? A bit of devotion, a bit of pressing in.

Despite what's going on, I'm going to be thankful. Pray without ceasing. Mark's Gospel. Early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus rose up and went out and departed into a deserted place and prayed there.

Okay, do I get up early in the morning to pray? If Jesus did it, perhaps I should do it. Now, we're not beating ourselves up, oh no, I'm terrible, but we're saying, what is pressing, what does pressing into God look like?

[ 12 : 09 ] What does being devoted to God look like? Well, it looks like those two things for a start. This is Colossians. This is Paul again. Since the day we heard about you, I would look at the back but I can't quite see it actually, we have not stopped praying for you.

We continually ask God to fill you with his knowledge of his will through all wisdom and understanding that is in the spirit. So their prayers were not only continuous but they were also specific.

He was praying for Colossians had a particular understanding. There were specific prayers. So lots of prayers in all circumstances, early in the morning, continually ask God to fill you with knowledge.

And his final one, this is talking to the Ephesians, and pray in the spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for the Lord's people.

So they're kind of four samples of the way in which Paul in particular and Jesus prayed. This is very focused, wasn't it? It's quite, getting up early in the morning is a bit of a, it's hard.

[ 13 : 24 ] It's hard. Giving thanks in all circumstances is hard. Knowing what to pray for, keep on praying, be alert, know what's going on, pray for people.

It's very strong, isn't it? So that's kind of an example of what a devoted life, which I wish I was more like that.

I really do. Because, that's right, go back to Simeon, sorry, I must move on. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel.

Israel. Israel was in a pretty bad way. They were under the Romans. Previously, they'd been under the Greeks, and previously, I think, they'd been under the Persians. But it was, they hadn't been their own nation for hundreds of years, really.

It was a mess. Spiritually, their leadership was poor. And Simeon was a devout man. He read his scriptures. He prayed.

[ 14 : 23 ] He was at the temple the whole time. He really wanted it to get better. He wanted those things fixing. He wanted, and the spirit was on him, it says, and moved by the spirit.

So he's not just a theoretician. He's a man of genuine spiritual action. He was, God had promised him that he would not die until he'd seen the Christ.

So he was clearly earnestly praying all the time for the consolation of Israel. And he was looking for a Messiah. And what happened? God led him into the temple courts that I showed you earlier.

And there were probably lots of babies being brought, weren't there? Lots of couples bringing babies. And God said, that one. And he's amazed.

It's a baby. Now, if he was a less devout man, he might have been expecting the Messiah to be a big Saran or Schwarzenegger character with a sword who was going to turn up and beat the Romans.

[ 15 : 24 ] or he might have been expecting a new David with a harp, singing beautiful songs and leading spiritually, but he got neither of those things. He got a baby.

So why? So I'm going to speculate a little bit here. I think Simeon knew his Isaiah. And in the ninth scroll, it would all have been scrolls back then, in the ninth scroll of Isaiah, it says, unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government will be upon his shoulder, and he shall be called a wonderful counselor of the mighty God.

So a baby is coming, says Isaiah, 700 years earlier, who's going to be God? Which would have probably blown the minds of the Jewish scholars. But Simeon knew that, and God led him, and he says, right, this is the baby who's going to be the almighty God.

He's the Messiah. Wow. This is a fantastic moment in his life. He's been praying and praying and praying and waiting. This event, this seeing, fulfilled his life of devotion to God.

Wow. But also, his longing was matched to what God was actually doing. As I say, he could have been waiting for the different, and this was, much of the politics at the time was, we want a different sort of Messiah.

[ 16 : 50 ] A hundred years earlier, they'd had, you know, messianic characters who had got armies up and it had been a terrible massacre. But Simeon knew the baby was the right way forward.

I'll speculate again. Mary, having experienced this, I reckon, maybe 10 or 20 years later, perhaps she spoke to Jesus and said, you know when you were born and I hadn't known a man and there were angels and there were shepherds and there were kings and then there was Simeon and Anna, two highly respected people, and they said these things about you.

Speculation. But, it could be that Jesus was affected by that. So, I'm not saying I want to die in peace because that sounds a bit morbid, doesn't it?

But how can I be satisfied with my life? Because, clearly, he'd come to a point where he was satisfied and he says, I can die in peace. That's what he's saying. These little scriptures here from 29 through to 32, they're often used in funeral services these days.

Now, let your servant depart in peace. Wow, I can die. I've seen the salvation. So, how can I be satisfied with my life? Well, if you're not a Christian here this morning, that's one thing.

[ 18 : 20 ] Come and speak to somebody about becoming a Christian. But, for us as Christians, well, the answer's here. One, what was Simeon? He was devoted to God. He was disciplined in his life.

Secondly, the Spirit was on him. He was moved by the Spirit. We can ask for the Holy Spirit to fill us. The Holy Spirit is with us, but we can ask him to fill us. There's a kind of dynamic, a daily dynamic.

Sometimes it works better if you ask for somebody else to help you fill this man with your Spirit. And thirdly, he was in line with what God was doing.

We often quote to each other, don't we, from Jeremiah when it says, I have plans for you, plans for you to prosper, and so on. And we sometimes apply that to myself. God's got an individual plan.

In fact, the you is plural. God has plans for you as a people. Now, he does have plans for us individually, but I think more he has plans for us as a people, as a church. And it's probably something we should be focused on.

[ 19 : 23 ] What is my church doing? What is God doing now? What do I need to follow? Not my own ideas, but what do I need to follow? Okay. Okay. So, Simeon was able to die in peace.

Not because his life was completely fulfilled in every way, but because he had seen God's salvation. He knew what was coming. He could be content when he died that Israel was going to be saved.

So, when I studied this a little bit and I was thinking about how we should see this.

Because it would be nice to die in peace in that sense, but actually, Simeon was a Jew. He didn't have a good understanding of the afterlife. Jew doesn't, really doesn't.

It has some concept of resurrection, but it doesn't really have its very well developed. Judah is very much here and now. It's about the temple, it's about the law, it's about the land. For a Christian, we have a much clearer understanding, don't we?

[ 20 : 36 ] There is a heaven to come. Yeah? There is a heaven to come because, now heaven is not because of our devotion, heaven is because we put our faith in Jesus and he gives us eternal life.

It's a gift. But actually, the Bible is pretty clear there are rewards in heaven. Yeah?

There are rewards in the sense not of we're given something because we've done something, but God wants to bless us. There is a recognition of our righteousness, faithfulness, devotion, good stewardship, and there is a recognition of enduring persecution.

So when we arrive in heaven, there will be treasures and there will be crowns. Now what are they? What is this reward we've got?

Well, Jesus talks about it as treasure. He says, lay up for yourself treasures in heaven, not on earth. Now it's kind of interesting because that is in Matthew 6.

[ 21 : 42 ] Matthew 5 is the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus talks about praying in secret and giving to the poor and fasting again in secret and righteousness and spiritual purity and all those other things that he talks about in the Sermon on the Mount.

And then he says, lay up treasures for yourself in heaven. So that is a reference to doing all those things in the Sermon on the Mount.

Praying, righteousness, pursuing justice, all the good things that Jesus lays out. You know, it's Matthew 5, I think it starts in. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness and all those other statements of Jesus' kind of declaration of what he's about.

And he says, halfway through chapter 6, do not store up for yourself treasures in heaven. Oh, on earth, sorry. But store up for yourself treasures in heaven. Paul uses the word crowns rather than treasures, but it's actually exactly the same concept.

What are those treasures? Well, we don't really know because heaven's a little bit mysterious. It's going to be very good. And there's extra approval. You can also get extra service because Jesus says, if you are faithful with this small thing, I will give you much more.

[ 23 : 04 ] So there's a kind of sense of, if you're responsible on earth, you get responsibility in heaven. Paul talks about it in terms of honor, recognition, extra joy.

Yeah? So, it's strange, isn't it? We don't often talk about this because I think as evangelicals we emphasize the fact that God has given us eternal life, which is absolutely true.

We cannot get it, as Martin Luther discovered. We cannot get it. No amount of devotion gets us into heaven. but, our righteousness, our faithfulness in particular, enduring persecution, is that an attractive idea?

Gets us a reward, a treasure, a well done, our good and faithful servant, Jesus says to us when you arrive. Anybody like that idea?

So, our scripture encourages believers to store up treasures in heaven and to look forward to God's reward. Why?

[ 24 : 07 ] Because God delights to reward his peaceful, for faithful service. You know, God is not paying us. He's not paying us. He delights to do it.

Now, on Christmas Day, my wife will probably give me a present. Now, if I took that present, I hope she will, and I looked, I looked on the internet and I said, how much is it worth? And then I added up the value of all the devotion I've given to her through the year and I said, is it equal to what she's given me in this present?

This would be pretty appalling, wouldn't it? I'd be in trouble. Okay. Because, because the present indicates her love for me.

And it's something that says, it's not, it's not related to what I've done. It's just a reward of delight. I hope.

Do you see the point? It's relational when God gives us these treasures and these crowns. It's not, you've earned it. It's, I love you so much and I see you did those things and I'm going to approve it.

[ 25 : 15 ] I'm going to give you a stamp of approval. I'm going to give you extra service in the kingdom, recognition, honour. There are some people going to be at the front in heaven and some people are going to be, frankly, at the back but it's such a joyful place.

If I've spent my whole life and my attitude to spiritual life is, yeah, whatever, you know, I'm going to make it into heaven because God is remarkably generous. But I'll sneak in, there might be a little bit of, a little bit of regret there but I think it'll be overtaken by heaven.

So, oh yes, so Paul to Timothy, he says this, he's nearly the end of his life, he knows he's likely to be killed.

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Think how much like Simeon this is. I can die. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award me on that day and not only to me but also to all of those who have longed for his appearing.

Simeon was the man who longed for his appearing and was therefore able to die in peace. Yeah? Paul's here saying, I've got a much clearer view because I know what's going on now, much more than Simeon did.

[ 26 : 43 ] There is a crown of righteousness. I don't know what that looks like, I don't know but I think it's very good. Which God will give me and all of those who have longed for his appearing will get this crown of righteousness.

Where's Jason? Ah, here he is. Do you want to bring the band up? Let me say a final few things. So, Simeon and Anna were devoted people, yeah? And they got to play a role in what God was doing.

They got to play a role. So they kind of got a reward there, didn't they? And Simeon had his reward to die well. And I think, you know, it's the same now. God hasn't changed if we are devoted to him.

Sometimes, even if we're not because, you know, God uses us anyway sometimes. But we want to play a part that the story is still unfolding. There's more to come. Can I hand up to Jason?

Thank you. you.

[ 27 : 53 ]