

What Our Gospel Lesson Teaches Us On The Last Sunday Of The Year.

Text: Luke 2:33-40

1) Firstly - A Question

Suggested Hymns:

2) Secondly - A Lesson

559, 396, 352, 282, 330

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Luke 2:33–40, ³³ *And Joseph and His mother marveled at those things which were spoken of Him.* ³⁴ *Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, “Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against ³⁵ (yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.”*

³⁶ *Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity;* ³⁷ *and this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day.* ³⁸ *And coming in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem.*

³⁹ *So when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city, Nazareth.* ⁴⁰ *And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

This is the last Sunday in the year, and our Gospel is a very suitable text for the occasion. The principal people in our Gospel, aside from the Lord Jesus who is always the centre of all, are an old man and an old woman, both far advanced in years, having arrived at a ripe old age and reminding us of life’s eventide and the end of our earthly pilgrimage.

There is old Simeon, who had taken the child Jesus up in his arms and had said, *“Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, According to Your word; ³⁰ For my eyes have seen Your salvation.”¹*

There is the aged Anna, who was a regular attendant at the temple, and was full of rejoicing when she saw the heavenly child Jesus, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

These old Simeons and Annas have not died out. There is to this day many an old man, bent with years, his eyes dimmed and his feet tottering, but his tongue filled with the praise of Jesus Christ who came to seek and to save that which was lost.

There is to this day many an elderly woman with silvery hair, having braved the storms and tempests of many a year, but her soul’s delight is to visit the Lord’s temple; and with the Psalmist she says, *⁸ LORD, I have loved the habitation of Your house, And the place where Your glory dwells.²*

Blessed are these old people who frequent the house of the Lord, though it is with faltering steps they must approach! Blessed are these old people who do not depart from the temple, do not keep away from the house of God, unless God Himself bids them to stay at home!

Blessed are these old people who remain steadfast in the faith unto the end, until their eyelids close in death. There is the expression of Christian joy and inward contentedness, still remaining on their pallid features, and silently proclaiming to those who gaze on these features, *“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸ Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness.”³*

Simeon and Anna, both far advanced in years, both not far from the grave, and with them — what a contrast! — the child Jesus who had just entered upon life’s pathway.

This is what our Gospel presents to us on the last Sunday in the year. Let us consider *What Our Gospel Teaches Us On The Last Sunday Of The Year*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Our Gospel Teaches Us On The Last Sunday Of The Year

Two Things, Firstly - A Question

Our Gospel proposes to us for the last Sunday in the year, in the first place, a question. What question? Let us examine the beginning of our text, and we shall see.

We read, ³³ *And Joseph and His mother marveled at those things which were spoken of Him.* ³⁴ *Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against"* ³⁵ *(yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."*

The question involved here is this: What did you make of the child Jesus in the year now drawing to its close? Was He set for your fall or for your rising again? Or, in other words, did you cling to the Rock of ages, to the Lord Jesus, did you remain in the faith, and progress in the faith, and thus improve in your Christian walk and conversation?

Or did you begin to lose faith in the Lord Jesus, to drop off, to leave that solid Rock, and float away upon the sea of this world and drown in despair or in the pleasures of this life?

My friends, there are only two ways, a narrow way and a broad way, one leading to life eternal and the other to eternal damnation; and there are only two relations of men to the Lord Jesus. Either He is set for their rising or for their fall.

It is not God's will and purpose that anyone should fall. He wants all people to be saved. But this is the outcome: Some rise at this Rock, and some fall. At this Rock the whole human race is split, is divided into two parts.

The one part believe in the Lord Jesus and are saved by Him, and to these He is set for their rising. The other part do not believe in Him, are offended in Him, reject Him, and to these He is set for their fall.

There is not another person in the world about whom there is so much controversy as the Lord Jesus. He is the sign spoken against. Some are for Him, some against Him. The message of the cross is to some foolishness, and to others it is the power of God.

The Gospel is to some a savour of life unto life, to others a savour of death unto death. And take note that the unfortunate class of those to whom Christ is

set for their fall does not consist of only those people who are His declared and outspoken enemies, but also of those who neither openly deny, nor publicly confess the Lord Jesus.

For what does the Lord say? He says in Matthew 12:30, ³⁰ ***He who is not with Me is against Me.*** There is no neutrality in this question. Whoever does not publicly deny Christ, so as not to hurt the feelings of true Christians, but at the same time, refuses openly to confess Christ before men, so as to be on good terms with the Lord's enemies also, is by no means neutral; no, he belongs to those to whom Christ is set for their fall.

How is it with you, then, my friends? Was Jesus set for your fall or for your rising in the past year? This is a serious question, so much the more because with such people who have been brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord and are accustomed to the preaching of God's holy Word, the fall generally does not come abruptly, but slowly and gradually.

When a huge stone is started from the top of a hill to roll downward, it will, at first, move slowly, but gradually its velocity will increase, and finally it will tear along with frightful speed, until with a crash it reaches the abyss below. And thus it is with many of those to whom Christ is set for their fall.

The first symptom of their fall is a certain indifference, a lack of zeal for heavenly things, which takes possession of their souls. They are not interested in God's kingdom as much as they formerly have been. They do not care as much for the Gospel as they did before.

If they can only find some trivial reason to stay at home on Sunday and not go to church they are glad to do so. They do not listen to the sermon with devout attention and with a desire to hear God's message.

And if something is said in the sermon that stings and disturbs them they object inwardly and harden their hearts against the divine Word. And if there is no halt in this downward course, still graver symptoms will appear. They will not read the Scriptures. They will not come to the Lord's Supper. They will cease to pray.

They will shun the company of Christians and seek their most intimate friends among the children of this world. They will commit gross sins and not repent, and thus keep on like the rolling stone in its downward course.

What a serious question, then, for all of us at the end of the year, the question: Was the child Jesus set for your rising or for your fall? Blessed is the person to whom Jesus was set for a rising!

Blessed is the person who firmly clings to the Rock of ages, whose faith did increase, and whose love to the Lord Jesus became all the more fervent! Blessed is the person who did not waver amid all the trials and temptations that did beset him during the past year in this vale of tears, but who stood firm and sought comfort in Christ's words!

Blessed is the person whose walk and conversation was in conformity with his Christian calling! In short, blessed is the person who came nearer to Jesus during the past year!

But how, my friends, if this was not the case with you? How, if you had started already on the downward course? Your own heart and conscience will tell you whether Jesus was set for your fall. But if that should be the case with you, sad as it is, let me tell you, there is still hope for you.

The Lord God does not want to see you lost. Even now Jesus extends to you His powerful and merciful hand. O come, believe in Him, trust in Him to give you strength, and you shall not perish, but have everlasting life.

2. Our Gospel Proposes To Us On The Last Sunday In The Year Two Things, Secondly - A Lesson.

And to show what we must do in order to remain on the path that leads to eternal life and not to go astray, our Gospel proposes to us, for the end of the year, a threefold lesson.

The first lesson we may take from Simeon's and Anna's good old age. Simeon had attained to an age reached by probably one in a hundred. He had been anxious to see with his own eyes the promised Saviour and then to depart in peace.

An old tradition has it that this was his last visit at the temple, that he fell down and expired on the floor of the temple when he had finished his hymn to the Saviour.

And of Anna we are told, ³⁷ *and this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years*. Such a good old age is awarded to but few among the living. What lesson are we taught by this?

We are taught not to put off repentance, and wait for old age to come, and then to prepare to meet God. You do not know how quickly or how suddenly you may be summoned to appear before the tribunal of your Maker.

Another year of your earthly pilgrimage is drawing to a close and so much nearer you are to the grave. Therefore fix your account with God, so as to be ready at any moment to depart in peace.

The second lesson we may take from Simeon's and Anna's piety and faithfulness in their attendance at the temple. Of Simeon we are told in a passage preceding our text that he *"was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him."*⁴

And of Anna we read that she *"did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day."* Seven years she lived with her husband from her virginity. Then came the lone days of widowhood.

But there is a guiding star by which she is directed on life's pathway, and that is the redemption through the Messiah, whom she expects to see before death comes.

Having pondered over the promises and prophecies of the Old Testament, she knew that now the time was fulfilled and that the long expected Redeemer was to come. She is old and feeble, but there is an occupation to which she clings and from which she can not desist, and that is to serve God with fastings and prayers night and day.

She is a widow indeed, as described by St. Paul in 1 Timothy 5:5, ⁵ *Now she who is really a widow, and left alone, trusts in God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day.*

Now, what lesson does that teach us? It teaches us to lead a godly life and faithfully to serve the Lord our God, not only privately in our homes by a diligent use of the word of God and by prayer, but also publicly by attending the house of worship, by taking an active part in the divine service, and by hearing with devout attention the preaching of the divine Word.

Do not fail, then, in the coming year, diligently to provide for the wants of your immortal soul, and to be fed with the bread of eternal life. Then, my friends, the coming year will be for you a year of blessing.

Even if dire calamities should be in store for you, it will be a year of blessing. We read in our Gospel, “³⁹ *So when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city, Nazareth.*”

But something intervened before they reached Nazareth, King Herod sought to destroy the child, and they had to flee to the land of Egypt. This, most likely, was the first occasion for a sword to pierce through Mary’s soul, to think that her child was the Son of God and that He must flee from a tyrant.

But soon this tribulation was overcome, and at the end of our Gospel we read, ⁴⁰ *And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him.*

Now what does the third lesson that teach us? It teaches us not to fear for the child Jesus, not to fear for the spreading of His kingdom and for the future welfare of the church.

Let the enemies of Christianity be ever so bold and use all their craftiness and power to destroy what God has built, they shall succeed as little as did King Herod. The Christ Child shall grow and become stronger, and no power in heaven or on earth shall be able to slow the progress of His church and the coming of His kingdom.

And if at times it may seem as if we must cry, “*Lord, help us, we are perishing!*”⁵ the Lord will always be with us, His little flock. He will not forsake us. He will help us with His powerful hand in all times of need and distress, and will finally escort us to the realm of glory, where we shall sing His praise forever. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Luke 2:29–30

² Psalm 26:8

³ 2 Timothy 4:7–8

⁴ Luke 2:25

