

Dartmouth Bible Notes



Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church
Series: Who is God/Who God Is Lesson 17 ("Advent" Attribute #5)
Scripture: LUKE 2:21-38 etc
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PP 1,2

A God Who is Always Just

Luke 2:21-38 (ESV)

²¹ And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

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 ²³ (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord") ²⁴ and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons."

²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. ²⁶ And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. ²⁷ And he came in 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, ²⁸ he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,

²⁹ "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; ³⁰ for 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."

³³ And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. 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, and for a sign that is opposed ³⁵ (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."

³⁶ And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, ³⁷ and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. ³⁸ And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

Introduction I have come to love the month of Advent before Christmas. I was raised with it in the Lutheran church and then saw it completely abandoned for many years in my evangelical life until a few years ago when we tentatively "tried it on" again. Now, *because* I am evangelical and actually *believe* the record of Scripture I am sort of permanently blown away by the excitement of annually *simulating* the feelings and facts of the time just before the first Christmas. I feel like in liberal Protestant environments they celebrate Advent because they are saying (quietly if not actually) that they *wish* these things were true and so they'll pretend that they are for a season... We actually believe that they *did* happen, as recorded by Matthew and Luke. IT WAS AT THAT TIME THAT THE SON OF GOD CAME DOWN TO EARTH, IN THE FORM OF A NEWBORN HUMAN BABY. If we don't even add in the

angels and the star and all the witness of Herod, and just consider the wonder of the baby Messiah, we are astonished. And so today, we still have the candles lit for EXPECTED, BORN, SURPRISES and WORSHIPPED. Each of those Advent themes supported an attribute of God: ETERNALITY, CAPABILITY OF BEING BORN AS A HUMAN, POWER and ADORABILITY. Our reading today is on **presentation**.

- Joseph and Mary did NOT say to themselves—“Hey we’re in a new dispensation now and we don’t care about the Law because we’re going to be about grace. Who cares about the Temple and doing all the rules because we’re going to become grace-people? We don’t need to circumcise Jesus or bring the two turtledoves or two pigeons because we’re going to be Christians now!” And so they did all that was expected of righteousness-minded Old Testament saints (which for them of course was the *only* “Testament”)...

PP 3,4

That Jesus was presented, and “on the side” *recognized* by **Simeon of Jerusalem** and **Anna, daughter of Phanuel**, hints of something important about who God is. Mary and Joseph were one week out from that cradle. The shepherds had busted in and reported seeing angels. Mary and Joseph had each been visited by an angel so they had no reason to doubt either the existence nor the “appearability” of angels. Luke tells us in a carefully detailed sentence (2:21)

And at the end of eight days, as Leviticus prescribed (ch.12)

when he was circumcised, young hipster parents today think this is barbaric – but it is what God said to do

he was called Jesus, this is what the angel told her to do

the name given by the angel Luke 1:31

before he was conceived in the womb. Mary knew Jesus name even before she was pregnant!

The rest of Luke’s description says that as he learned of what went down he saw that Joseph and Mary were completely compliant with the Law—all that it said to do at the time of child-birth if you expected God to bless your little family.

Then Luke (and *only* Luke), tell us about **Simeon** and **Anna** and their roles that day. Simeon’s words are fascinating to me: THIS CHILD is appointed. God does that. He appoints. And in His Son’s case He sent Jesus so there would be some who would fall IN ISRAEL, and some who would rise up. Herod would fall down. Caiaphas would fall down because of the coming of this child, and while Simeon would not live to see it, his words would come true. Others would rise up because of this Child. Peter would rise up. John would rise up. Lazarus would *literally* rise up. MANY would rise above their normal station because of this Child. And the implication that I see in Simeon’s prediction is that there was coming a new era of equalizing, of evening out of things, of JUSTICE--because of this Child. It “sounds like the God of the Bible is all about eventual justice happening, which is because He is a JUST GOD.

PP 5,6
2

JESUS' COMING is the plan and the force of a just God.
That is what I'm saying today.

There are many other places of course, in the Bible where the justice of God is more plain and more bluntly stated—it was obvious to all the biblical writers that God is a completely and permanently just God. There is no being easy on people and letting them off inappropriately, or being too harsh *beyond* what someone exactly deserves...

Deuteronomy 32:4 ***The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he.***

Psalm 99:4 ***The King in his might loves justice. You have established equity; you have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob.***

Isaiah 30:18 ***Therefore the LORD waits to be gracious to you, and therefore he exalts himself to show mercy to you. For the LORD is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for him.***

Isaiah 61:8 ***For I the LORD love justice; I hate robbery and wrong; I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.***

Romans 3:25, 26 ***...whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. ²⁶ It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.***

Ephesians 6:9 ***Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.***

You see, God is never *not* just. Our predicament is that when bad things occur we think He has forgotten to show up. I do not mean to minimize or trivialize human tragedy. Why bad things happen and how to fit them into some plan of a just God, is one of the great philosophical debates of history.

- How can a God who claims to be completely and unchangeably just allow a Holocaust to occur?
- How can He allow “sudden infant death syndrome” to happen?
- How can He allow a man to cheat on his wife, or vice versa? How can He allow murders and rapes and thieves to heartlessly steal from senior citizens?
- How could He allow Satan to come before Him and seek to ruin Job?
- How can He allow any injustice at all to occur in His creation since He claims to be a just God.

This is a hard problem to deal with and a strange paradox to defend when we come to apologetics. And there are many good thinkers who bring careful answers to this question that I can recommend.

PP 7,8

But today, we are simply asserting that GOD IS JUST. He is really good at being just. In His being He possesses a perfect “read” on any and every situation and remember: He is not bound or trapped in time where (unlike us) He can’t see the long game. He is timeless and above time and He is also sovereign and also unchanging and also eternal. He feeds His “Providence” to His people here, now, who walk with Him closely and studying His Word. He gives intuition and insight through the indwelling Holy Spirit that works in sync with His Word in our lives.

If you are faced with a question in your life of how to justly deal with a situation, He will give you a leading with the situation if you are in His Word. Jesus told His disciples ***If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you*** (John 15:7). One of the things you might ask is, “Lord, please give me wisdom on how YOU would respond to this?” and He will!

What I see in this that leads me to ask, “What can I learn about God in all this?” is that God is a God of COMPLETE JUSTICE. No detail no matter how small it might seem, no matter if modern people think this detail or that is even barbaric (as though we should talk!), is too trivial. Every detail of what Messiah would need to happen around him, is fulfilled. We might have given Joseph and Mary a pass on some of these things. We might say, “Yo Joe—lighten up.

The eighth day, whatever.

Circumcision, you can skip that one.

Two measly birds, let it slide. Doesn’t matter. You’ve got Jesus, man!”

But they did everything they knew to do. There is no record of any hesitation or doubt about them. And certainly no arrogance to set aside what in earlier times God had prescribed—even demanded. Aren’t you glad that even when Jesus is only eight days old, the people involved *not even knowing what they were doing* really, did what they were supposed to do? This says to me that the scene God was laying out, was a scene engineered by a JUST GOD! In fact, although we want to be light-hearted about Christmas, the whole Christmas story *screams the justice of God* which is clean, impartial and complete.

It was good and right that the wise men would be warned in a dream to go home a different route and avoid Herod.

It was good and right that Herod would die and then Jesus could return home.

Joseph and Mary, not only around that first cradle but in the days after as they went on the road—down to Egypt—I am sure had to ask for wisdom and the protection of Providence. They knew that God is just and since they had been

informed that their Child was very special, they had to know that He would be protected. God is just. He would care for them all. Mary also heard Simeon's words that ***a sword will pierce your own soul also*** (Luke 2:35a). There were times I feel, before the cross even when Mary would feel her heart troubled because of things Jesus was doing or saying. She had to believe that her God was JUST. He would vindicate Jesus. His mission would even extend to the Gentiles and that must have been a really mind-blowing thing (as Simeon predicted that too, Luke 2:32).

The whole Christmas story, each year, sings about a just God that sent His Son at just the right time in history, to become the Savior of the world. His justice will not be denied. His own justice had to be satisfied by payment for sin, OUR sin. And the Son of God stepped up to the plate and said, "I will provide that." And although we have to live in this broken world, and watch hard things happen we place our trust in a sovereign God who will, in His good time, bring a complete vindication to all things righteous. No one will be left out. No one of His saints, that is. If you are not sure if you know Him yet, invite Him in! Ask Jesus to be your Savior. You will find Him to be a delightfully fair God.

PP 9,10

In His time, in His time
He makes all things beautiful
In His time

Lord please show me every day
As You're teaching me your way
That You do just what you say
In Your time

In Your time, in Your time
You make all things beautiful
In Your time

Lord my life to you I bring
May each song I have to sing
Be to You a lovely thing
In Your time *