

## Unransomed

Luke 2:22-38

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Even though I've been able to preach for you and be up here about six months now, this is kind of the one time where I might actually be a little more nervous or skittish than usual as my parents and brother are here. That's for two reasons; one you always want to make your parents proud, and the second is if things go poorly they'll tell me about it for the rest of the day.

Anyway, we had the reading from the gospel quite by accident actually, the rest of the Christmas story. Luke tells of Jesus' birth and of the shepherds and the angels, and then he starts launching into a series of events in Jesus' life that build a significant amount of momentum. And that momentum, as we're going to see, launches Jesus into His ministry for us who are reading and hearing the gospel. But I think also touches on something that were going to find is fairly important. So, we've already heard it read so there's no need to read it again.

But when they go up we hear, or we notice, that with Jesus being born, there have been now two requirements placed by the law given by Moses on Mary. The first is one of purification by the act of giving birth. I'm not entirely familiar with the birthing process and I would rather not be. By virtue of blood flowing from Mary, and I guess other icky bodily fluids, she has become ritually unclean; that's expected, that's part of the process. And the way that she would become clean again is by the sacrifice of the lamb and through a purification ritual. Now as it turns out, there's a provision in the law that states if the family can't afford a lamb, then they may use two pigeons or two turtle doves. Luke mentions specifically, in fact he mentions a lot of details, he mentioned specifically that Mary and Joseph offer two birds. This at the outset tells us that Jesus was not even middle class, definitely born into poverty. Interesting environment to be born in, especially if your birth means good news to the poor.

Now the second requirement I believe is much more profound. This is the dedication of Jesus. Now it's required that all firstborn males are dedicated to God. When we read that law, it's actually in Exodus. It says that if someone asks you why you do that, they say tell them, "By a strong hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt from the house of slavery. For when Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the Lord killed all the first born in the land of Egypt. Both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of animals. Therefore I sacrifice to the Lord all the male animals that first opened the womb, but all the firstborn of my sons I redeem."

So the typical course of action would be that if you have like a donkey, and they give birth to a male donkey; and this would be its first, it would sacrifice to God as a way of remembering the exodus. If you had a male child you wouldn't sacrifice him, but you would dedicate them to God, and then symbolically buy them back. The amount of

money that it would take was negligible but the idea was to connect with the symbolism of the exodus. One of the consistent themes throughout the Old Testament and really even into the New Testament as we see, God saying, "Do not forget that you were slaves and I brought you out of Egypt. I redeemed you, I ransomed. Do not forget that." So we see that played out with the requirement placed on Mary and Jesus.

Now Luke does something interesting here; he is not one to miss details. In fact that's one of the things the gospel of Luke excels at. He mentions that Jesus is dedicated, and then he mentions nothing about being bought back. Now if he were to go through the effort of mentioning what they had sacrificed specifically, I think he's saying something here about having Mary and Joseph not redeeming or ransoming Jesus. Immediately he is set up, and as I said he's going to start building momentum here, that whoever this Jesus is, that he is dedicated to God, that he is dedicated to God's service.

If you remember Samuel in the Old Testament, his mother Hannah brings him to the temple and dedicates him to God and to His service, and then of course does not redeem him back, and Samuel spent the rest of his life serving God.

I think he's saying something. Now, he continues it by running into Simeon. As we heard from the reading, it was prophesied that Simeon would see God's Christ, or the Messiah before he died. What Luke is saying is clear. But then Simeon breaks into this poem that not only is kind of nice, and not only is marking an occasion, but he's saying something very specific about Jesus, and these words have echoed throughout the history of the church. It says, "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace according to Your word. For my eyes have seen Your salvation that You have prepared in the presence of all peoples. A light for revelation to the gentiles and for glory to Your people is real."

Now you can't just necessarily walk away from it. As we also saw Mary and Joseph were kind of astounded. Goes to show that even they didn't totally understand who this Jesus was. Then immediately after that, Anna, a prophetess, identifies Jesus as roughly the same thing; as the Redeemer, the Savior. So very quickly, in the span of just a few verses, whoever this child is, He means salvation. That it is God here with us, Emanuel, that what He means is salvation to the world, and it's kind of a grandiose thing to have said about your child. I know we like to think our children are special, but I think this takes the cake. Immediately after this Jesus is twelve years old and in the temple, and He's clearly presented as a prodigy in terms of knowing and expounding on the scriptures; showing up adults. And then immediately after that His ministry begins.

So Luke builds this momentum, identifying who Jesus is and what He needs, laying it out there. And then the next chapter, Jesus starts His ministry.

I think it's interesting that both Matthew and Luke do this. Where they talk in quite a bit of detail about Jesus' birth. And then they mention very little about His childhood, and then they go right into Jesus' ministry. In fact they skip 30 years of Jesus' life, 30 years. Now as best we can tell, Jesus would have worked as a carpenter. That's our best guess because that's what Joseph did, and He would have followed in His father's

footsteps.

So, as I've been thinking about this, thinking both for the message and just in general, why does that sound at least a little bit familiar? I assume everybody here knows I just survived my first Christmas season as a full time church worker. Turns out it's pretty brutal, kind of chaotic and there's a lot to do. And throughout Advent we build up expectations that Jesus is coming and we're going to celebrate this, and we build up the momentum kind of like Luke did. Then Christmas Eve comes and Christmas Day comes, and we celebrate His birth and Jesus is here. Then I don't know, we go back to work. I mean I've got to call our cell phone company, and I think I have to vacuum; I hate vacuuming. But then what just happened to all this excitement about Christmas?

Or in the case of Jesus, there's this amazing experience in the temple where two prophets say to Mary and Joseph, "This is the hope of the world," then they go home. Got work to do, got a hammer to swing. And there seems to be something very off about that space between. I know we've got Lent and Easter at least on the horizon; there's a while until then. And even if people don't celebrate Jesus' birth when they celebrate Christmas, there's still kind of that post holiday *hrmmm*, I've got to catch up, stack of paperwork, I hate paperwork. I've a couple of phone calls to make, reservations to follow up on. There just seems something unspiritual and insignificant about returning back to normal life.

Now I wonder if it says something that Jesus spends all but three years of His adult life as something of a carpenter; at the very least a day laborer. And the question I want to explore is, does it say something, that literally God incarnate, God with us, the hope of the world, swings a hammer for thirty years? Does it say something about the day to day routine mundane life, vacuuming, dishes, paperwork? Does it say something about that significance, and the spiritual nature of these kinds of things?

Now I mentioned this even in the first service when he wasn't here, but my dad works for Coca Cola, and he specifically works in the juice side of things; Minute Maid and some others. And I remember maybe 4 or 5 years ago, we were going back and forth in an e-mail, and he had mentioned, "I just make juice for a living." There was something about that that has stuck with me; I found it almost impossible to forget ever since. And the question is, making that kind of statement says that there isn't any significance or any spirituality in making juice. Now I'm using the words significant and spiritual for a reason, just so you know. I wonder because our culture likes things black and white; we like things either or. Something or someone is good or bad. Worship is contemporary or traditional. Someone is a liberal or a conservative; democrat, republican. Something is underground or mainstream, or spiritual or unspiritual. And yet Jesus, God walking around on earth, God Himself, Creator of the earth walking on the earth physically. Slings a hammer for the vast majority of His life. I think it extends even beyond that though.

I remember it was maybe two weeks ago an article flew by my radar where a woman was talking to customer service for something. And in that exchange the operator finally insinuated or flat out said that because the woman was a homemaker, you don't have a

real job. Ooh yes, I can hear the murmur. Why is it if a woman wants to raise her family and not have a career, why is that not significant, at least according to culture? I would say otherwise. Now what I argue is that for us to say that the mundane things that we do aren't quite as insignificant or unspiritual as sometimes they feel? Because it's easy to just kind of crash and burn and lose all notion of why it is that we're doing these little things, and 'it's just stupid and it's a waste of my time.'

Or, I work as an accountant, why am I just doing this? This is pointless, it means nothing. Why does making juice mean nothing? And what I want to say is that ultimately I think, the fact that Jesus slings a hammer for the vast majority of His adult life says something. And it says something about the importance and the validity, and I think the spirituality, of what might appear as unimportant. As I've been thinking about it, and I'm not going to lie, I'm going to say right out, 'I hate mundane, routine administrative tasks. Pastor Draeger has lost at least more hair trying to get me to fill things out and submit things I'm sure in the last 6 months, than he has in the last ten years. Sorry....we didn't bring that up in the interview.

I was thinking about it, and what if my story was too small? What if we consider maybe our stories are too small? What if Jesus working as a carpenter for most of His life, even though He is the Son of God, what if He's not just working as a carpenter? What if He's taking part in God's story? What if, as we're overseeing the juice making process, what if as we sling hammers, crunch numbers, fill out paperwork, do dishes, raise our children, what if that's not the only thing that's going on. That there's more taking place than just what we see. That what if we're actually caught up in the huge, grand, epic story, where God is the main character, and we play our small, but significant roles as a part of that greater hope. That as Jesus is engaging in carpentry or something similar as best we can tell, that He's not just wasting His time splitting wood, but instead He's taking part in this rhythm of the story that God has set up. Now for Jesus it of course doesn't stop there, He ends up redeeming the story. At His death and resurrection the story takes a really hard shift in a good direction. And that's where we are today, and if you're here worshipping with us I think it's safe to assume that we take part in God's redemption.

And as God continues to redeem the earth and spread His gospel, and then as we hope and look for the resurrection. Even though we are in that post holiday slump, filling out paperwork, scrubbing, filing, that still doesn't change the fact that we are part of God's story, and this part of God's story is so much bigger than just this little mundane task. Or our role in God's story is so much bigger than coming down off the holiday fun - 'nothing means anything again, and got work to do.'

Now, that the very things that we do are inherently significant and inherently spiritual because they are not done in of themselves, they are part of a context. And that context is God's story, and God's story leads to redemption, rescue and resurrection. And that, I think, makes even the hardest tasks mean so much more because that's not the only thing that's going on. And we're not the central character, God is.

As we leave here, yes we have New Year's, but then after New Year's I suppose we go back to work or school or home. We're still taking part in God's epic narrative; God's story. And that means it is significant and it is important even when it doesn't feel like it and doesn't look right. Amen.