

(INTRO) TAUGHT US TO LOVE, CHAINS SHALL HE BREAK

[1] **WELCOME:** Good Morning everyone and Merry Christmas. If you're new with us or just now joining us online, my name is Nic Cook and I'm one of the pastors at Cornerstone Church. We're really glad to have you here. [2] If you haven't already, at the very least, let us know you're here either by commenting in the chat section, as well as let us know how we can be praying for you by going to auburncstone.info and filling out our digital connection card. Today we're continuing our sermon

SERIES: called THE THRILL OF HOPE. We've been using both the book of Luke and the lyrics from the Christmas carol, O Holy Night, to teach us about Hope. We've talked about the lyric [3] "Long lay the world, in sin and error pining" and how we can have hope and wait actively when God seems silent or distant. We talked about the lyric [4] "till he appeared, and the soul felt it's worth" and how God loves to show up to ordinary people doing ordinary things, in ordinary places. That he came from heaven, to the manger, to the cross, and now lives in the hearts of his followers.

This week we're going to be in [Lk. 2:22-38] so if you'll go ahead and open up your paper or digital bibles and get ready to read God's word together. We're going to unpack these lyrics, [5-6] "truly he taught us to love one another, his law is love and his gospel is peace. Chain's shall he break for the slave is our brother." **When we read the Christmas story, it can be easy to sanitize it and strip it of its radical message.** We focus on the sweet little baby laying in the manger or on the beautiful star overhead. However, when you examine the hopes of the people in the story, we see them hoping for God to step in and free them from oppression. They were hoping God would deal with evil. They were hoping that God would set the world right and make it possible for the poor and the powerless to begin to thrive. **They were hopeful that this baby would break chains and save them from their enemies.**

I don't think we're any different this Christmas. We look around at this world and it's still not right. There's still corruption, oppression. There are still poor and powerless people who are not thriving. We see sickness, brokenness, and helplessness all around us. We wonder, God when are you going to do something about this? **And if we're not careful, we can miss what Jesus came to do and the things he still wants to do.** So let's pray and we'll listen to what God wants to say to us about Jesus through his word. Let's pray. Let's read [7-11][Lk 2:22-38]

(TEACH/APP) THE SALVATION WE REALLY NEEDED

BACKGROUND: There are 4 major songs sung as part of the Christmas story that Luke tells us. Zechariah sings a song, Mary sings a song, the Angels sing, and then we have the song that we just read from Simeon. If you look closely at the things they say you'll see that most of them express similar things. [13] **They are all expressing that God is going to bring salvation in some way. For example...**

MARY: says [14][Lk. 1:51-53] These aren't just words to her. She's talking about those in power over the Jewish people, the Romans, who have been ruthless in killing anyone who stands against them, they have been oppressive in collecting high taxes from people who have very little. While she and her people struggle to eat, they seem to be feasting. So when she sings of what her Messiah is coming to do, she sees a day when those who are on the bottom of the social scale are elevated, and those who are proud and dismissive end up experiencing justice. **Then...**

ZECHARIAH, the father of John the Baptist, sings. [15-16][1:71-75] Zechariah is echoing the same expectations. Our God is going to deal with our enemies and save us from the people who hate and harm us. This is the undercurrent that was present during the entire life of Jesus' life and ministry. [17] **Salvation meant having a military leader who would defeat earthly enemies and build an earthly kingdom. However, when you get to the song of... [18]**

THE ANGELS: instead of speaking of enemies, they say that they're bringing good news for "ALL PEOPLE". [Lk. 2:10] It seems like the heavenly messengers are clued in a little more about what salvation is going to look like. That it's not just salvation for the Jewish people from their enemies, but it is salvation for the rest of humanity. So, the question is, **what is Jesus coming to save the world from?** They give us a hint when they sing their song in verse [19][Lk. 2:14]. Salvation is about bringing...

- **PEACE ON EARTH:** I absolutely love the Hebrew word for peace, Shalom. Our understanding of peace is so weak in comparison. All we associate with peace is a lack of fighting or war. For the Hebrew people, if you wish someone the very best, you're wanting [20] shalom for them. **You're wanting wholeness and flourishing.** Shalom means God takes the broken things in your heart and in your mind and in your body and puts them back better than they ever were. Shalom means the things that cause humans to distrust and destroy each other are eradicated and erased. Shalom means humanity lives into its full potential and is a

blessing to God, each other, and the world it inhabits. Just describing that makes me long for shalom, Peace, wholeness, and flourishing on earth. **But how is Jesus going to bring shalom? Is he going to become a military leader who crushes his enemies and establishes shalom through conquest and violence?** [21]PEACE THROUGH VIOLENCE? As Luke has been telling the Christmas story he has bringing the story of Jesus as a baby to a conclusion in a very special place...

THE TEMPLE: [22]PEACE THROUGH SACRIFICE Luke moves us into the temple. The temple was the focal point of the life and community of the Jewish people. Their entire calendar was built around the times they had to travel from their homes to Jerusalem to go to the temple. Their sense of time was based on the times when sacrifices were made. Their understanding of their relationship with God was based on whether or not a sacrifice had been made to make it possible for their sins to be forgiven. The temple was where God promised to dwell among his people in a special and mysterious way. **God intentionally made the temple the center of Jewish life, not the Kings palace, or the marketplace.** He wanted the people to realize that their deepest need was not for an earthly ruler, or a strong economy but their **deepest need was to be forgiven and to be able to be in God's presence.** Luke is telling us that...[23]

• **JESUS DIDN'T COME TO SAVE US FROM EARTHLY ENEMIES. HE CAME TO SAVE US FROM SIN THAT KEEPS US FROM SHALOM.** 2,000 years later, humanity is still looking for salvation. What we really need is a vaccine to save us from Covid. Yeah, but even if there was no covid, humanity is still broken and full of division, we're just that way stuck in our houses. What we really need is a new president to save us from the last president. You really think this next four years will be any less broken than the last four years? Presidents haven't fixed the hatred and violence in the hearts of humanity. What we really need to do is get businesses up and running so we can be saved from a depression. But a great economy has never brought true happiness or gotten rid of poverty. **Shalom, wholeness, human flourishing can't be brought about by any vaccine, ruler, or economic system, because it doesn't address the spiritual darkness and disease in the human heart.** [24]OUR GREATEST PROBLEM ISN'T SOMETHING OUT THERE IN THE WORLD, OUR GREATEST PROBLEM IS

○ **SIN THAT IS INSIDE THE HUMAN** I came across this quote from author Ann Voskamp. [25-27]She says "Like the diagnosis of a doctor, every

other religion says that good-enough living will save us. But like a soul specialist, Christianity examines our hearts and says that actually we're all terminal unless we take Christ, that it's Christ who saves us. Every Christmas tree is shadowed by the Cross tree: it's at the Tree that God does heart transplants. He takes your heart and does surgery. Christianity doesn't make narrow-minded claims. It makes a different kind of diagnosis. It's not about being narrow minded, it's about offering a different kind of medicine. In the care of souls, Christianity isn't so much about exclusiveness but effectiveness. What will actually save us?

The Jewish people wanted a military leader who would defeat earthly enemies and establish an earthly kingdom. What humanity really needed was a **spiritual leader who would destroy our greatest enemy of sin and make us the kind of people who want a heavenly kingdom.** [28]JESUS DIDN'T COME TO BREAK THE POWER OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE. HE CAME TO BREAK THE POWER OF SIN THAT CHAINS THE HUMAN HEART. **Jesus didn't ride in on a war horse and destroy his enemies, he rode in on a donkey and was destroyed by his enemies and destroyed for his enemies. We were God's enemies.** A man named Isaiah who lived hundreds of years before Jesus describes what Jesus came to do for us. [29-30][Is. 53:4-6] Jesus died for us so that we could be rescued from the power of sin in our hearts. He died to make it possible for us to experience shalom, peace, wholeness. To be put back together, to have hearts that love good and turn to God and experience rich full and abundant never-ending lives. **Jesus takes enemies and slaves to sin and makes them family and free to live and love well. Once we under that, then the song of Simeon becomes even more beautiful.**

(JC) SEE JESUS AND GIVE YOUR LIFE TO HIM (JC)

[31][Lk. 2:29-32] I have seen Jesus! God's Son! He's the one who can save us from our sin, from our brokenness. He is the one who can begin to restore broken humanity to wholeness and help us live truly good and human lives that honor God. God I'm not afraid of death any more! Because your Son has conquered death by rising from the grave, I know I will rise from the dead too! Because he took my sin, I know I'll be with you forever after this life is over. [32]That my friends, is the thrill of hope, that is what can make a weary world rejoice! SEEING JESUS, KNOWING JESUS, BEING LOVED AND FORGIVEN BY JESUS. BEING MADE NEW BY JESUS, AND KNOWING THAT WE WILL BE WITH JESUS EVEN AFTER DEATH!

- This Christmas, just like Simeon, we'd like to give you the beautiful gift of knowing and following Jesus. If you'd like to know more about what he came to do you can fill out the connection card at www.auburncstone.info and check the box, I'd like to know more about following Jesus. Or if you're ready to take the first step in giving your life to Jesus by getting baptized, it's your way of saying God I know I can't fix my heart on my own. God, I need a new heart. If you're ready to go under the water and die as an enemy of God and come up out of the water alive as a member of his family, auburncstone.info. **Now, for those of us who have been followers of Jesus for a while, we need to be reminded of the rest of Simeon's Song.**

(NXT/INSP) SAVED PEOPLE LOVE THEIR ENEMIES AND LONG FOR THEM TO BECOME FAMILY

[33][Lk. 2:30-32] Simeon looks at Jesus and says something that most Jewish people weren't thinking. **Jesus is for everyone! Jesus is for all people!** Jesus is the light to show God to the nations. **Anytime you read nations, you need to think, everyone else that is not Jewish.** I'm gonna go out on a limb and say that 99% of us watching this are not Jewish. That would have meant that we would have been hopeless if Jesus was the messiah people were hoping for. A Jewish Messiah who built a Jewish Kingdom and conquered non-Jewish people. But Jesus didn't just come for a special group of people. He came for all people! Rich people, middle class people, poor people. He came for white people, black people, Asian, south American, African, Islander, every kind of people. Jesus wasn't worried about borders, skin colors, economic status, or language. **And as we have said, Jesus loved all of us so much that he died for his enemies to make them family. And he calls us to follow his example. That's because...[34]**

- **SAVED PEOPLE LOVE THEIR ENEMIES AND LONG FOR THEM TO BECOME FAMILY:** Jesus tells us in **[35-37][Lk. 6:27-31]** How is it possible to love our enemies? Because we remember what it was like to be God's enemies. We didn't deserve his love or forgiveness. We were selfish, rebellious, and destructive to God's creation and to the people he created. Yet he loved us anyway. Saved people pray for their enemies because Jesus prayed for us while we were still his enemies. He said "father forgive them for they know not what they do! Saved people long for enemies to become family. **There are two ways this works out...**

- **WHO IS OUR ENEMY?** Who is the person you can't stand? Who is the person that you'd be okay if they just ceased to exist? Who is the person who has hurt you the deepest? Who is the person you struggle to forgive? **Maybe this Christmas Jesus wants to not only break the chains of unforgiveness in your heart, but also save that person and bring them into his family. Maybe he wants to turn your enemy into his family, your family! Secondly...[38]**
- **SAVED PEOPLE LOVE OTHERS BY SERVING THEM!** That's why historically the church has been on the forefront of helping to break chains of

1. **Slavery and Racism.** Paul urged a Christian brother to treat a runaway slave like a freed brother. Later the Church saw that people of color were being treated like animals instead of like brothers. Christians like William Wilberforce, Charles Spurgeon, and John Wesley spoke of it's evils and worked to rid the world of it. Many Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians freed their brothers from slavery before the Civil war ever happened. Christians today are still working to end the slavery of human trafficking. **Christians are called to break the chains of...**
2. **Poverty:** Long before state governments stepped in, Churches started and ran food pantries for those who are hungry, hospitals for those who were sick and hurting, they started schools and universities to help educate the poor who couldn't afford training. Christians are still doing this today. They're running clothing connections, they're serving in Auburn food pantries, they're financially giving through things like Making Christmas Better.

The radical message of Christmas is that the Baby sent this world, didn't come to destroy his enemies but to love them and set them free from the chains of sin. He came to make them family. A follower of Jesus named Paul beautifully summarized this when he said.. **[39-42][2 Cor. 5:16-21]**

Let's pray! Jesus make us reconciling people. People who love their enemies. People who love other human beings because they are made in your image. People that love those you came to die for. I pray that you would help us to make a difference in this world by loving and forgiving as we have been loved and been forgiven. Thank you God that your son is for everyone, that you long to see the whole world become family.