

“Deliverance Remembered” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Christmas 1 December 29, 2024

- I. **Luke 2:34-35** – Simeon said to Mary, “Behold, this Child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.”
- II. **Yesterday was an important day for some Americans.**
 - a. Each year on December 28, people gather in New York City to celebrate Good Riddance Day.
 - i. This year’s celebration drew hundreds of people to Times Square, as mini chalkboards were handed out with the chance to write down anything from the past year that a person wants to forget.
 - ii. Some of the things people wrote down on their good riddance list were bed bugs, belly fat, a bad job, loud neighbors, sadness, and relationship breakups.
 - iii. Once these items were written, the participants then erased them and cleaned their slates as a way of starting fresh in the new year to come.
 - iv. Good Riddance Day started in 2007, and it was modeled after a Latin American tradition that included writing down bad memories, stuffing them in a doll, and throwing them in a fire.¹
 - b. It seems funny to me that people might think they could erase the thoughts of these bad things that happened in the prior year.
 - i. It’s hard to say whether these people will have ongoing thoughts about former loud neighbors or bedbugs, but I doubt this exercise will help that much.
 - ii. Sin is a part of this process, because it challenges us by introducing all kinds of negative thoughts – and usually suppresses the good ones!
 1. Maybe sin has wired our brains to focus less on the good and more on the bad.
- III. **Our story today is right on the heels of our Christmas reading.**
 - a. The Law of Moses required Mary and Joseph to go to the Temple in Jerusalem for 2 reasons.
 - i. The first reason was for Mary to be purified after childbirth.
 1. The purification sacrifice was made 40 days after Jesus’ birth, and Mary needed to sacrifice a lamb, but they were poor, so they sacrificed 2 turtledoves.
 - ii. The second reason they went to the temple was to sacrifice another lamb for Jesus as the firstborn of Mary.

1. You see, as we read in our Exodus passage today, God called on His people to remember when He brought them out of Egypt by sparing their firstborn from the angel of death.
 2. He said that all firstborn children were His, and they must sacrifice a lamb, just like at the Passover in Egypt to consecrate or set aside that child to God.
 3. It's interesting that Luke doesn't mention this sacrifice of a lamb for Jesus, but what is Jesus called? He is the lamb to be sacrificed.
- b. As they come into the temple a man greets the family, who may have been older, but it doesn't really say.
- i. Simeon was led or filled by the Holy Spirit to do and say these things.
 - ii. He was waiting for the consolation (relief, the comfort) of Israel.
 1. He longed for an end of the oppression of Roman rule, and the relief that the Messiah, the Anointed One, would bring as He ruled in power... and that glory would return to Israel.
 - iii. Simeon says the words we are familiar with as the *Nunc Dimittis*, which is Latin for now dismiss, or "You now dismiss your servant in peace," which we may sing at the end of services.
 1. The reason Simeon is able to depart in peace is because the salvation that God had promised throughout history was now in his hands as he looks at the God of the universe... in the flesh.
 2. As a righteous man, Simeon would know all the Old Testament Scriptures that pointed to the coming of a Savior, and he was waiting for this very day.
 3. Simeon holds Jesus and blesses God and the family with his own prophecy as he says to Mary "Behold, this Child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed." (vv 34-35)
 - iv. So the thoughts of many hearts might be revealed...

IV. **What thoughts need to be revealed in our hearts?**

- a. Sin has invaded even our thoughts, and it shows up in the negative ways we think... by forgetting God's deliverance for us... and not loving others.
 - i. Hebrews 4:12 says, "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart."
- b. As believers, we wouldn't want anyone else to be aware of our thoughts, because others would find them offensive... but God knows what we think.

- i. Our thoughts betray our lack of love when we judge others by the clothes they wear or their looks, and we don't bother getting to know people who don't look like us.
 - ii. The sins of others are clear in our minds – with zero tolerance for their bad behavior... so we condemn them in our thoughts, but we would never admit we do some of the same things.
 - iii. We spend all our time thinking about the trials of life, the bad things that have happened to us, and we never see the good things that Jesus brings us every day... we fail to remember God's goodness.
 - iv. In our pride and arrogance, we think we know better than God and just ignore the teachings in the Bible we don't agree with.
 - v. We think the people who have harmed us should not be forgiven, and even though God tells us to forgive, we cannot stop thinking about getting even rather than forgiving.
 - c. The thoughts of the heart are the reason we need a Savior who will forgive us, renew our minds, (Romans 12:1) and give us new life in the Holy Spirit.
- V. **Jesus, our salvation, was born to cleanse us from all sin.**
 - a. Yes, we may struggle mightily with our sinful thoughts, but even the mind and heart are cleansed through the sacrifice of our Savior.
 - b. It's just like Jesus held His own "Good Riddance Day" when we came to faith – as He took all the sins of thought, word, and deed, listed them on a slate board and wiped it clean... using His very blood.
 - c. The baby destined to save us all would grow up to pour out His blood on the cross... to grant us all the forgiveness that no one else could give.
 - i. It is true that we will always struggle with sinful thoughts, yet we also know that by the power of the Holy Spirit we are able to change and heal those thoughts.
 - ii. Colossians 3 reminds us that by God's power, we can turn our minds to Christ... "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. ³ For you have died, and your life is [secure] with Christ in God." (Colossians 3:1-3)
 - d. The Lord God has delivered us from slavery and the bondage of sin – and Simeon recognized this wonderful gift that was promised so long before.
 - e. In conclusion, we say the same words as Psalm 139, "²³ Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! ²⁴ And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!" (Psalm 139:23-24)
 - f. As our thoughts are pure and our remembrance of God's deliverance is clear, we celebrate the Lord's salvation! Amen

¹ Steven Vago and Katherine Donlevy, *Hundreds swarm Times Square to bid 'Good Riddance' to bedbugs, menopause, exes and more before the new year*, The New York Post Newspaper Online Edition, Published Dec. 28, 2024