

A Declaration of Those Things Which Are Most Surely Believed Among Us

An Expository Study of **The Gospel According to Luke**

Chapter 2- Luke 2:21-40

24- The Four Witnesses- Part 1

March 29, 2009

Luke 2:21-40

There is one question that is the most important question in all the Universe. This is the Big Kahunnah Question; the \$64,000 question that trumps every other question that exists. This question is not, "*How can I make more money?*" This question is not, "*How can I be happy here on earth?*" And this question is not, "*How can we retake our country?*"

Those are all important questions- but they are not the most important question that we need to answer. Here is the most important question that we need to be able to answer:

God is holy and I'm not. I am a sinner and God is infinitely holy and righteous. When I die- I have to give an account of everything done in my body- whether it be good or bad. When I die- I must stand before this perfectly holy and perfectly righteous God - Whose Eyes burn like flames of fire and Who knows my every thought, and I must stand for His examination of my life. So since that is true- since God is holy and I am a sinner- how in the world am I going to pass through God's Judgment of my life?

No other question on earth even comes close to the importance of this one single question. And no other issue that we face today - like The War on Terror, the Economy, or ungodly Leaders is anywhere near as vital an issue as each one of us being able to answer that question correctly. Nothing else matters unless this one question is tended to. Nothing else is even worthy of discussing unless this one single issue is settled forever. Get this question right- and you will go through this life with Joy and Peace and spend eternity in Heaven with Jesus. Get this question wrong and though you own the entire wealth of the world- you

will die in your sins and scream in torment throughout the ages of eternity in a devil's hell.

And how you answer that question determines everything else about you- how you live your life, how you spend your money, how you talk, how you raise your children, and what you do and what you do not do. That is how important this question is.

And although there are over 8,000 different religions and human philosophies in the earth today- 7,999 religions and human philosophies all answer that question the very same way- that in order for me to pass through God's Judgment of my life- I must develop my own personal righteousness by what I do and through my efforts.

So as far as Salvation goes- there isn't a dime's worth of difference between being a Jew or a Muslim or a Jehovah's Witness or a Buddhist or a Roman Catholic or a Mormon or a dialectic Humanist- they all teach the very same thing as to how a sinful man can be saved and pass through the Righteous Judgment of a holy God. To these false, man-made religions- Salvation is a matter of what I do and how long I do it.

But one religion- one single Religion- it was originally called "The Way", we call it today- Biblical Christianity- and most people thought it was simply a sect of Judaism- but was brought forth by this Man Who was born in Bethlehem 2,000 years ago to a virgin and was found by the shepherds wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a horse trough. This Man- Who was God Almighty- inserting Himself into His Own Creation- Who was the most unique Man Who ever lived- 100% God and 100% Man in the same body at the same time without conflict or contradiction - this one single Man by Who He was and by what He Alone did in His sinless Life and in His Death. Burial, and Resurrection, paid for all my sins in dying on the Cross and by raising Him from the dead in triumphant Glory- God the Father gave to God the Son a Name and a reputation and an Authority that is above every other Name- that at the Name of Jesus- every knee will bow and every tongue confess- that Jesus Christ is Lord- to the Glory of God the Father and this one Man- all by Himself became sin for us Who knew no sin that we might be made the Righteousness of God in Him, and His Name and faith in His Name and in His finished Work takes my black heart and washes it in red Blood and makes it whiter than snow, and casts all my sins into the depth of the sea, and this Man seals my heart and saves me to the uttermost by what He did for me, and God imputes

the Righteousness of this Man to me and allows me to pass through God's Judgment of my life and enter into Heaven forever!

Now Most people- especially here in America- are very familiar with the story of the birth of Jesus, and we are familiar with Joseph and Mary and familiar with Bethlehem and with the shepherds and with the angels and the manger. Those are very familiar parts to this Story of Salvation because of our observance of what we call Christmas. And Luke has taken us through those familiar elements.

And if we studied verse by verse through **The Gospel According to Matthew**- we would meet some more familiar elements that Luke does not mention- like the kings or the wise men. Luke doesn't say anything about the wise men, but Matthew does. And those mysterious and wonderful men from the East who followed the star looking for the great King that had been born- the incredible account of their arrival and the gifts of gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. And then there was that frightening story of Herod- who upon hearing about the birth of the rival king, as he saw Him- decided that he had to save his own throne and so he massacred all the little baby boys in the area. **Matthew** tells us about that familiar story too- but not Luke.

And then there is the very brief account of the family of Joseph and Mary and the baby Jesus fleeing for their lives into Egypt to be protected from Herod. These are familiar and beloved scenes that get retold every Christmas season. And after they are retold- they sort of go into an eleven-month closet every year and then they're brought back out in vivid color just in time for another Christmas season. And we hear them often repeated with all their beauty and wonder every year.

But what is less told and even less known is the account that we're about to read in Luke today. And because we don't know what we are going to learn today- we are all the worse off for that.

Now there is a principle that is woven into the very fabric of our lives that we need to be made aware of. And it starts out in the Bible way back in **Deuteronomy** and it's the Principle that says that any testimony that is worth believing should be confirmed by the mouth of two or three witnesses. Even today in our Court System- testimony that is corroborated by two or three witnesses is considered to be credible and believable and true and testimony that does not have that corroboration is considered to be less valid.

And the Principle that governs our modern American Court System that teaches that any testimony that is worthy of belief should be corroborated goes back to the Biblical affirmation, that credible testimony had to be confirmed in the mouth of two or three witnesses. And the testimony of Luke in this Book has been that Jesus has been born "Son of God, Son of Man, Son of Abraham, Son of David." The testimony is that Jesus came into the world as a child of a virgin, having no human father, being fathered by God Himself through the power of the Holy Spirit, being planted in Mary's womb without a human father, thus He is the child born of a virgin. And Luke has given testimony to the fact that this Child is God in human flesh, that this Child is the eternal King- Who will reign on the throne forever and ever, and that this Child is the only Savior of the world.

This is the Child Who will save people from their sins. This is the singular and the greatest Child ever to be born in the history of the universe.

And testimony that is that powerful and a testimony like that- that demands such a response from all of Mankind needs to be confirmed. And so Luke in this section brings in the testimony of witnesses. And there are not two or even three witnesses to what Luke has testified about this Child- but there are four:

1. There is the testimony of Joseph and Mary- the parents' testimony.
2. There is the testimony of a man named Simeon.
3. There is the testimony of a woman named Anna.
4. There is the testimony of God Himself.

Four testimonies are given- four eyewitness confirmations are given as to the identity of this Child. And so rest of **Luke 2** confirms the credibility of Luke's testimony that this Child is indeed the Messiah- the Son of God, the anointed Christ, and the Savior of the world.

Now there's something you want to know about a witness. There's something you want to know about someone called to testify. The only thing that matters about a witness is whether or not they are honest. How much money they make or how tall they are- or even what their educational level is- is not a concern. But if they are unreliable, if they are untrustworthy- then their testimony is meaningless. You want to

know that a person who is testifying is honest and so you want some kind of indication as to their character. And Luke is very careful in this passage to let us know that the witnesses that are called to give affirming testimony to Jesus Christ are indeed righteous people. They are credible witnesses precisely because they are righteous. So we can believe their testimony because of the character of their lives. And so we find here that Luke gives much information about the character of all of these witnesses.

And the first thing we find out about has to do with the parents of Jesus. Now we already know they are righteous- because in **Matthew 1:19** it says, "**Joseph her husband, being a righteous man**". And that is to say he was right with God- that's what the Scripture means. He was right with God. Joseph was one of a small remnant in Israel and Joseph was righteous.

Now in Israel at this time- the righteous were a very small remnant. You see, like America in our day- the majority of the people of the nation of Israel were theologically liberal- and were heavily influenced by the Sadducees- who didn't believe in a real Resurrection and didn't believe in angels. The Sadducees denied the supernatural and they were the theological liberals of the time and they had great influence on a lot of people in Israel in the first century.

And over there were the conservatives- called Pharisees- who were very dismayed at the liberal turn that the nation of Israel had taken and were trying to bring Israel back under the Law. And everybody who as influenced by the conservative Pharisees believed that they could work their way to Heaven by their own righteousness that they developed through adherence to the Law.

And then there were those that we could say were the nationalists- the people who had reduced the service of God as being nothing more than a political thing. These were the zealots. These people were zealous for the preservation of the nation Israel and its political autonomy and independence, and their goal in life was to overthrow Rome and get back their Jewish autonomy as a people, and they're often identified as The Zealots and they are sometimes called The Sikarii because they carried little daggers and they stabbed the Romans in the back or at night. These guys were the original terrorists.

And there was another group of Jews that was called The Essenes. And these were the ascetics- the hermits- the original monks. And the

Essenes lived out in the wilderness and they were out there in a monkish kind of life, isolated from all society- contemplating their theology.

And in the midst of all this confusion and turmoil in a nation that had fallen far away from God- there was a very small remnant called the righteous. And these were those who loved God and who followed after God- however imperfectly. And these were so scarce that even after the three-year ministry of Jesus and after His Death, Burial, and Resurrection- when all the believers of Jerusalem gathered in the Upper Room, there were only 120 of them.

But however few they were- there were some righteous people in Israel- God had a remnant of righteous people. And Luke tells us that Zacharias and Elizabeth- the father and mother of John the Baptist- were both righteous. They were a part of that holy remnant.

So God was working the coming of His Messiah and the forerunner to the Messiah, the prophet John- God was working that all out through righteous people- people who belonged to Him; people who believed in Him; people who were right with God because they had come to grips with their own inherent sinfulness and knew that they couldn't save themselves and they had repented of their sins and cast themselves on the Mercy of God. And God had forgiven them and saved them from their sin. They were the righteous remnant.

And it's important to have testimony from righteous people. First of all, we find that Joseph and Mary were righteous and the evidence of that comes because **Matthew 1:19** said of Joseph that he was righteous. And secondly, we know that Mary was righteous because of what came out of her mouth in **Luke 1:46**- when she said,

46...“My soul exalts the Lord,

47 And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.

48 “For He has had regard for the humble state of His bonds slave; For behold, from this time on all generations will count me blessed.

49 “For the Mighty One has done great things for me; And holy is His name.

50 “AND HIS MERCY IS UPON GENERATION AFTER GENERATION TOWARD THOSE WHO FEAR HIM.

51 “He has done mighty deeds with His arm; He has scattered *those who were proud in the thoughts of their heart.*

52 “He has brought down rulers from *their* thrones, And has exalted those who were humble.

53 “HE HAS FILLED THE HUNGRY WITH GOOD THINGS; And sent away the rich empty-handed.

54 “He has given help to Israel His servant, In remembrance of His mercy,

55 As He spoke to our fathers, To Abraham and his descendants forever.”

... so we know that Mary was a righteous girl.

And Luke gives us insight into their dedication to God and the consecration of their lives because it tells us right here in today's text in **Luke 2:21** that Joseph and Mary brings Jesus to the Temple to have him circumcised and that they were obedient to the Word of God given through an angel in a dream to name the Child Jesus- so let's read that verse again:

21 And when eight days had passed, before His circumcision, His name was *then* called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb.

22 And when the days for their purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord

23 (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “EVERY *firstborn* MALE THAT OPENS THE WOMB SHALL BE CALLED HOLY TO THE LORD”),

24 and to offer a sacrifice according to what was said in the Law of the Lord, “A PAIR OF TURTLEDOVES OR TWO YOUNG PIGEONS.”

Now look closely at verse 23. Luke tells us that it was written in the Law that every first born male was to be called "holy", or in other words- every first born male child was to be given to God and was to be separated for the Lord's use.

Now five times Luke tells us that Mary and Joseph obeyed the Law. First it says in verse 22:

... when the days for their purification according to the law of Moses were completed

So Mary waited for her time of purification after giving birth was over before she took her child to be circumcised. So Mary was obeying the Law here.

Secondly verse 22 goes on to say:

22 ...they brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord

23 (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “EVERY *firstborn* MALE THAT OPENS THE WOMB SHALL BE CALLED HOLY TO THE LORD”),

So here in obedience to the Law- both Mary and Joseph obeyed the Law after Mary had obeyed the Law in waiting for her purification by bringing Jesus to Jerusalem to give him to God.

Thirdly- look at verse 24:

24 and to offer a sacrifice according to what was said in the Law of the Lord, “A PAIR OF TURTLEDOVES OR TWO YOUNG PIGEONS.”

So after Mary had obeyed the Law in waiting for her purification and after both Joseph and Mary had obeyed the Law in bringing their first born son to Jerusalem to give him God- they both then obeyed the Law by offering a sacrifice of two turtle doves or two pigeons.

Fourthly, look at verse **27**:

And he came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to carry out for Him the custom of the Law,

So even though this was not an additional thing that Mary and Joseph did- Luke wanted his readers to know how much Joseph and Mary were obeying the Law by putting this phrase in here.

And then, fifthly- look at verse **39**:

When they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city of Nazareth.

So by telling us these five times that Mary and Joseph did all of these things in obedience to the Law- Luke is giving us tremendous insight into the godly and righteous character of these two people- showing us that they are indeed very credible witnesses.

And the Apostle James had great insight into this when he wrote in **James 2:20**:

But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?

And again in **James 2:26**:

For just as the body without *the* spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.

So Luke goes to great detail to let us know that both Mary and Joseph were obedient, they were both humbly submitted to the Law of the Lord, they delighted in the Law of the Lord, and they endeavored to live their lives in accord with the Will of the Lord- as revealed in His Law.

So here is a righteous young couple. They were saved. Their sins had been forgiven and they were devout and they were obedient to the Law of God as an expression of their love and their worship toward God. And Luke wants us to know that they both are incredibly reliable witnesses.

And then by introducing us to Simeon- Luke goes into great detail to establish how righteous he is. And then Luke introduces Anna to us- and we will see that it is hard to imagine that there could be any woman in all of Israel who was as righteous as Anna was. And, of course, the fourth testimony is given by God Himself- Who is all Righteous in His Nature.

So what you have here is confirming testimony by the parents, by Simeon, by Anna, and then a final confirming Testimony from God Himself. So in combination- these are incredible witnesses to Luke's account to the Roman dignitary named Theophilus, and by extension to us- that Jesus is, in fact, the Son of God and the Savior of the world.

Now the setting here is tied to two things. It's tied to the Mosaic Law because you're in the temple. And what's going to go on here is all connected to the Mosaic Law and to Temple Sacrifices and Temple Offerings. Also, this entire passage in Luke borrows richly from the writings of the prophet Isaiah. And that shouldn't surprise us because from chapter **Isaiah 40** through **Isaiah 66**- the Old Testament prophet

unfolds the Messiah. So you're going to see a very Jewish background- a very Jewish setting for the scene that unfolds before us. And this scene is tied to the Old Testament Law and the Prophets- the Mosaic Law and the prophecies of Isaiah.

So we have righteous people giving testimony to the identity of Jesus Christ. And this is critical so that Luke's fantastic claims concerning Christ are confirmed by the mouth of two or three witnesses- who are righteous and trustworthy.

So this morning- let's look at the testimony of Joseph and Mary. This is the testimony of Jesus' parents- His birth mother Mary and His adopted or foster father, Joseph.

And let's read again **Luke 2:21-24:**

21 And when eight days had passed, before His circumcision, His name was *then* called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb.

22 And when the days for their purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord

23 (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “EVERY *firstborn* MALE THAT OPENS THE WOMB SHALL BE CALLED HOLY TO THE LORD”),

24 and to offer a sacrifice according to what was said in the Law of the Lord, “A PAIR OF TURTLEDOVES OR TWO YOUNG PIGEONS.”

Now as you read this at first- you may not catch the depth of it- so let me go into this more deeply- so that you may see the treasures that are inside. Now as I have already mentioned- Luke gives us five different references to the behavior of Joseph and Mary- and their devotion to obey the Will of God is clear. They both wanted to do what God had revealed for them to do, and they did it with joy and faithfulness. So the whole passage really features their dedication and their obedience. And as I said earlier- in Luke's continuing effort to mold our understanding of just who Christ is- he shapes his narrative around the testimony of these uniquely righteous people. And the first testimony is from Jesus' earthly family.

And Joseph and Mary give testimony to the identity of the Child as being the Messiah and the Savior of the world in two distinct ways:

1. At the circumcision and the naming
2. At the purification and the presenting

And, Lord willing, we're going to see the circumcision and the naming in verse 21, and we'll see the purification and the presenting in verses 22 to 24. And these are the two ways in which Joseph and Mary validates the claim made by Luke that Jesus is the Messiah- the Son of God- and the Savior of the world.

So let's look at verse 21 because here is where we will find the circumcision and the naming. Now we need to remember that the eighth-day circumcision was what was prescribed by Mosaic Law. It is clearly recorded that this is to be done because **Leviticus 12:3** says that on the eighth day- the child is to be circumcised. Every male child born into Israel was to be circumcised on the eighth day.

And this circumcision actually predates Moses because circumcision was introduced by God to Abraham in **Genesis 17:1- 14**. And Abraham was circumcised as an old man when God identified him as the father of the race. And circumcision was an outward sign, a token that whoever as circumcised was of the chosen race and under the Abrahamic Covenant. And once Abraham was circumcised- God told him to take a sharp knife or rock and cut the foreskin of every male on the eighth day of their life. And that cutting of the foreskin of their flesh was a sign and a symbol of God's Covenant that He would be their God and they would be His people.

Now circumcision was a sign of God's Covenant. It was an outward sign as to who was supposedly in right standing with God and who was under the Promise of the Abrahamic Covenant. But God was also saying something through that fleshly circumcision.

In the cutting away of that foreskin- God was first of all doing something physical. By cutting of the foreskin of the flesh of His people- God was protecting the Jewish man from passing on infections and bacteria to his wife during their marital relations.

Remember in ancient times- they had no antibiotics, no hospitals, no penicillin, no IV drips, no sterile environments, and very little personal hygiene. But, in spite of that great lack of cleanliness- according to ancient historians- Jewish women of the ancient Middle East had the lowest rate of cervical cancer of all the women in the world, and the greatest factor in that being true beside their diet was

the fact that Jewish men were the cleanest men of the Middle East at that time because they had been circumcised.

So God imposed circumcision on His people to physically preserve them in the earth. God was definitely committed to preserving His people since they are the center of all Redemptive history- all the way to the end of the world. And so God protected them and gave them dietary laws and this law of circumcision to preserve His people on the earth from disease and infections and illnesses.

And God also protected His people from illness by imposing monogamous laws on them, and by demanding their purity, and by instituting marriage as being between one man and one woman for one lifetime, and by calling for the immediate death of adulterers and fornicators and homosexuals and people who perverted themselves with children and with animals, and those who engaged in orgies and those who engaged in drunkenness, and those who intoxicated their minds, and those who murdered and those who stole and those who coveted and those who dishonored their parents- you know the same kind of stuff you will find in most night spots here on the Gulf Coast almost any day of the week.

We need to remember that venereal diseases ran rampant through the barbaric and pagan cultures like the Canaanites and the Perzites and the Jebusites and the Philistines and the Babylonians and the Persians just like it is doing to the United States precisely because they had what was called then and what is called today free sex and free love which is anything but free- it is one of the most costly things that have ever been and whole civilizations in the ancient were wiped out because of sexual sins and women were treated as sexual objects and personal possessions in most of the world, and they were enslaved by evil men until God brought civilization and order and morality and dignity through His Sovereign imposition of the Law to the Jews.

God said do not engage in sex outside of the bonds of Holy Matrimony, do not engage in homosexual acts, do not touch a child or an animal in that way, and if you do- you will get sick, and when you get sick- you will die, and after you die- you will go to hell forever. So part of the reason why God imposed both circumcision and morality on His people was to preserve them in the earth.

But circumcision was more than just physical protection. It was a symbol of our need for spiritual cleansing. And that's why the Bible

talks about circumcising our hearts. God was showing them through this physical symbol that being cleansed as not just nice, it wasn't just a better way to live- no, God as showing us that we need to be cleansed because we are all sinners in our hearts. God was saying that people not only passed sin on physically- but they also passed sin onto the next generation heart to heart and soul to soul. When they had a child- they got a sinner 100% of the time because they passed on Adam's rebellious nature to their children. So they needed a cleansing at a deep, deep level of their souls. And that's why God said to circumcise your heart.

So every circumcised male child then, every time that operation took place, it was a symbol of how deeply sinful people were and how greatly they needed a heart cleansing.

So the message that God was sending to His people was about their sin. You could take the Law of God and all the Law of God did was break them and crush them. The Law of God was laid out before the Jew and did nothing but declare him to be a sinner. Each individual man who was born tried to keep the Law and after all his effort and all his struggle and all his human ability- at the end of the day- the Law looked him in the eye and called him a sinner- a transgressor of the perfect standard of Righteousness which is the Law.

The Law was never meant to be an end to itself. The Law is a means to an end- it is a schoolmaster that brings the broken man to Christ for Mercy. It forces the man who thinks that he is going to keep the law into the chute of unmerciful and unchangeable Divine Perfection, and as that man tries to live up to the Standard of perfect and continuous righteousness- the Law breaks him into a thousand pieces, and in that broken condition- the man cries out to God for Mercy, and God saves him through Faith in the finished Work of Jesus Christ. The Law was not meant to save anybody and nobody has ever or will ever be saved by the Law. The Law was meant to bring us to Christ.

For example- the Jew would look at the Sabbath which is the fourth commandment, "**Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy,**" and when he looked at the Sabbath in the middle of the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments, he would focus on that Sabbath. And he would not work. And he would not leave his house. And he would not cook anything and he wouldn't carry a load- he wouldn't do anything. But then he would sit and he would contemplate that day. And as he looked

at the Law of God and as he considered the worship of God, what he would become aware of was that everything above the fourth commandment, one, two and three, had to do with God. Everything below had to do with Man. And he would look at that day and he would remember that day in the middle of the Decalogue, look up and see how he had violated all the laws against God. Look down and see how he violated all the laws against man. In other words, he would come to the realization by resting on that day that he had sinned against God, he had sinned against his fellow man. So the Sabbath then became a contemplation point for violation of the Law of God.

And he would then look at the whole complexity of the Law that sort of came out of the Ten Commandments and he would realize how he had violated that law as well. So the Sabbath day then became a day for man to do nothing but to contemplate his own inherent sinfulness.

And on top of the Sabbath day- there were other Sabbaths- all kinds of Sabbaths. Every time there was a feast of Passover, every time Yom Kippur came, the Day of Atonement, Rosh Hashana, every time there was a Feast of Lights, every time there was a Feast of Tabernacles, or Booths, every time there was Pentecost, there were many other things. And all of those Sabbaths were times to contemplate God and in contemplating God and His commandments- you contemplated your own sinfulness and how you had broken the commands that related to Him, and broken the commands that related to men. And then life was just filled with that contemplation.

On top of that, life was a bloody mess because all those violations called for a sacrifice. That's why we've said, the priests were nothing but butchers. They were hip deep in blood- slaughtering animals because sin just kept coming and coming, and with it came sacrifice and more sacrifice. And the whole of Judaism, the whole of Judaism was one massive effort on God's part to call those people to a recognition of how sinful they were. Every time a baby was born into the world, circumcision on the eighth day was a reminder of the depth of that sin- that they were so deep in sin that they needed a cleansing at the deepest level.

So all that Judaism is- is a system that is designed by God to make people feel the burden of their sinfulness. And by the time you get to the time of Jesus, you've got only a few honest righteous Jews who are willing to think like that. And the rest have fired off into one

or another direction. You've got the liberal ones who don't even want to think about the letter of the Law. You've got the Pharisees, the legalists, who have exchanged the heart for the head and it's all external and nothing is internal. You've got the politicizing Zealots who have just abandoned all of that and gone for a political end. And then you've got the Essenes who are out there contemplating their navel, trying to think themselves to a higher level and are not concerned with the obedience to the Law of God in Scripture.

And, of course, we have the very same thing going on today. Most all of the Jews today are either what you call liberal Jews or "conservative" Jews, or reformed Jews- but there are very few orthodox Jews who are actually careful and thoughtful about the Law of God. And among them are very few who really believe God and know God through their Messiah.

Now I know why there are liberal Jews, and I know why there are reformed Jews and conservative Jews today because they want to keep the *traditions* of Judaism. But the problem with that is that you can't keep Judaism in its true Biblical form without constantly facing your own inherent sinfulness- which is why it's not popular. So if you buy into the whole Law system- then you're literally swept away in your own sinfulness. And that is the intent of the Law- that's why God gave it- to prove to us how sinful we are.

Now you can become a Pharisee and content yourself with only the externals- but that doesn't please God. Or you can just run from it altogether and become liberal like the Sadducees did and bail out all together and question whether the Scripture is even the Scripture.

So there's a lot of popularity in hanging around to the ethnicity and some of the cultural aspects and traditions of Judaism. But if you ever shed Judaism as a system and begin to look at the Law as a mirror- reflecting your own inherent sinfulness back to you- Judaism loses its appeal very quickly because there is never any Salvation in it.

And so babies were circumcised. But now the question comes up, *"Why did they circumcise Jesus? Circumcision was to be cleansed- but Jesus was sinless- so why did they circumcise Jesus?"*

First of all- that is exactly right. Jesus didn't need His heart cleansed because He was holy, harmless, and undefiled, and separate from sinners- the writer of **Hebrews** said in **Hebrews 7:26**. Jesus didn't need His heart cleansed from sin. He was sinless. He was numbered

with the transgressors, it says in **Isaiah 53:9**, even though there was no deceit found in His mouth.

In fact, when He died on the cross He was bruised for OUR iniquities, punished for OUR transgressions. He is called in **2 Corinthians 5:21**, "**Him who knew no sin.**" So Jesus was and is absolutely sinless. So why was He being circumcised here?

And there's one very good answer. Because that's what the Law of God required. And in **Galatians 4:4**, the Apostle Paul said:

But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law,

Whatever the Law of God prescribed in the Covenant at that time, Jesus would do.

Now this is very similar to what happened with John the Baptist. Jesus came to John to be baptized. Why was Jesus baptized? Was Jesus sinful and did Jesus repent of His sins and get saved and need to be baptized? God forbid. Jesus had no sin- none- so He was not baptized for the remission of His Own sins- but He was baptized so that all righteousness could be fulfilled- so that we could follow in His footsteps and so that He could fulfill the Law.

So I could understand if Jesus' parents had discussed this and said something like, "*You know, this is God in human flesh and I don't know if we are supposed to do this circumcision. What if something goes wrong here? What if some bleeding, or what if some infection sets in- I mean, after all- this is the Son of God- is this really even necessary?*"

I mean I've thought often about what it might have been like raising Jesus as a baby. I mean, how you would have treated Him. Talk about being protective!

But no, His parents were both righteous and so without hesitation- they brought Him to the Temple on the eighth day and they had Him circumcised. And I'm sure that God prompted their hearts to do that and the reason was because Jesus was born under the Law and Jesus was going to obey every aspect of God's Law.

And He obeyed the Law as a baby passively, and He obeyed the Law actively as an adult when He went to the river Jordan and He said to John the Baptist, "*You need to baptize Me.*" And John said, "*You*

must be kidding me- I don't need to baptize You- You need to baptize me." And in effect- John was saying- *"You don't need cleansing- so why the symbol?"* And Jesus responded in **Matthew 3:15** and said,

Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness

...in other words- whatever the Law requires- I will do it.

Now it would have been conceivable that the Father could have said to the Son, *"Now You have to go down and redeem humanity. And I know that's a tough thing, but I really only need You for a weekend... You know, go down Friday morning, we'll crucify You Friday evening, actually You can come out of the grave Sunday morning, be back late Sunday afternoon, I really only need the weekend."*

And that is true if all you want is to be forgiven- because it's the death and the Resurrection of Christ that purchases our justification, right?

So the Father could have just required Jesus to come down on Friday Morning- die on Friday afternoon and go back up on Sunday because all that we need is the Cross and the Blood and the Resurrection, right? Isn't that what we have all been taught ever since we were saved- that it's all about the Blood and the Cross and the Resurrection?

Well, let me say to you that if that is all that it took for us to be saved- then God would be cruel. If all we need to be saved is the Shed Blood and the Cross and the Resurrection, then God would have been cruel to make Jesus live down here on earth for 33 years before He died and rose again.

So the answer is that even though the Blood of Jesus is wonderful and glorious and precious, and I would never do or say anything to take one single thing away from the Blood, and even though I love the Old rugged Cross, and even though the Resurrection is absolutely vital to my Salvation- those three things are not enough for even one single person to go to Heaven.

And that is why we need to know about the two parts of Justification. Justification has two parts- not just one. We need to be forgiven- Oh, yes we do- we need that precious Blood of the sinless and spotless Lamb of God that was shed for us on Calvary's tree in order

that our sins may be washed away. We need God to impute or credit every single one of our sins onto Jesus- our past sins, our present sins, and our future sins- all of our sins were imputed or credited or laid on Jesus. Jesus did not sin. The sins that God put on Jesus were not Jesus' own personal sins- they were mine and yours. This is imputation- which is a legal transaction- and by that legal transaction- God made Jesus to be sin for us - even though Jesus was perfectly sinless Himself.

So God took my sins and laid all of them on Jesus- Who had personally never sinned. And then God did something else. God took the Righteousness of Jesus- the perfect spotless sinless Righteousness of Jesus- and God imputed or credited or laid that Righteousness on me- in another legal transaction- even though I am personally sinful.

So when God looked at Jesus - hanging on the Cross- God saw pure sin- because all my sins and all your sins were imputed to Jesus- even though Jesus never personally sinned, and when God looks at me- He sees the sinless Righteousness of Jesus Christ- even though I am a sinner.

The sins that God imputed to Jesus on the Cross do not belong to Jesus, they will never belong to Jesus- they are not His Own inherent sinfulness- but they are a foreign or an alien sinfulness- that is completely separate from His Own Sinless Nature.

And the Righteousness that God imputed to me does not belong to me and it will never belong to me- it is not my own inherent Righteousness- but it is an alien or foreign Righteousness- that is completely separate from my own sinful nature.

So Jesus was made to be sin for us and we are made to be the Righteousness of God in Christ Jesus in the greatest Divine swap that the world has ever known. And it is that Righteousness that allows me to go to Heaven.

Listen- being forgiven is great and without being forgiven- nothing else happens. I'm all about being forgiven and God's Merciful and Gracious Forgiveness is the best thing in the world.

But to simply be forgiven is not enough to enter into Heaven. Why? Because I have sinned and because I am not only guilty of sin- but I am also unrighteous and the only kind of person who can go to Heaven with God are those who are just as Righteous as God Himself.

Not only is sin itself prohibited from entering into Heaven- but sinners- those who have sinned - they can't enter in either.

"But wait a minute, Brother Blair- if sinners can't enter into Heaven- then how are any of us going to go? We have all sinned and so if only Righteous people can enter into Heaven- then how in the world are we going to go?" Three things have to be done:

1. We must be forgiven of the sins that we have already committed and the sins that we are committing right now and the sins that we will commit in the future
2. And that forgiveness is secured only by God's Justice against my wicked sins being completely and eternally satisfied by God pouring out His full Fury against my sins without measure on Jesus- Who bore all my sins- so that my sins are forever paid for.
3. We must be made Righteous- just as Righteous as God is Righteous.

And I tell you that the Death, Burial, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ accomplishes the first step for us by carrying out the second step. I am forgiven- even when I sin today - not because I ask for forgiveness, and not because God loves me so much, and not because I am such a nice guy- but all of my sins are forgiven precisely because the Justice of God was satisfied. And God's perfect Justice was satisfied only because all of my sins were paid for as God's Wrath against my sins was poured out on Jesus, and there remains, therefore, no Divine condemnation for me.

But wait- there is more. Because I did sin and because I do sin and because I will sin in the future- I am unrighteous. So I have been made Righteous by God taking the spotless Righteousness of Jesus Christ and imputing that Righteousness to me.

Now here's the kicker. Where did Jesus get His sinless, spotless, and perfect Righteousness? Where did it come from so that God could impute it to me?

The answer is that Jesus earned it. Jesus worked for it. Jesus earned His Own perfect Righteousness by keeping the Law of God perfectly and continuously and never sinning one time in thought, word, and deed. He was tempted in all points like as we are, and yet- He never sinned one time. Jesus never had a lustful thought, Jesus never

coveted, Jesus never lied, Jesus never blasphemed God, Jesus never committed adultery, Jesus never dishonored His parents, Jesus never had any God's before Him, Jesus never made Himself any graven image and bowed down to it, Jesus never stole anything, Jesus never bore false witness, and Jesus always kept the Sabbath holy.

Jesus did what the Law required; Jesus kept the Law perfectly in the letter of it and in the spirit of it by living down here on this earth for 33 years and never sinning one single time. And in so doing- Jesus *earned* Heaven; Jesus was saved by His Own Righteous Works. Jesus completely and utterly and eternally fulfilled the Law, and therefore- the perfect spotless Righteousness that the Law described was His- He earned it- He actually did it!

So it is true to say that Jesus was saved by Works and that we, too, are saved by Works. *"Now wait just a minute, Brother Blair- what are you saying here? We are not saved by Works at all- the Bible says we are saved by Grace through Faith."*

Ah, yes, it does- but faith in what? We are absolutely saved by Grace - by the unearned and undeserved Mercy of God- that is absolutely true- but what is it that we are to have faith in, what is it that we are to trust for our Salvation? Why we are to trust in the finished Work of Jesus Christ. We are to put all of our trust in Who Jesus is as Lord and as Almighty God manifested in the flesh, and we are to have faith in or put our trust in all that Jesus did while He was here on earth- in His Righteous life, in His Death, Burial, and Resurrection. So we are saved by Works- only it just isn't our own works- it is the glorious Work of Christ on our behalf.

So while it is true that we could never be saved by our *own* works of righteousness- precisely because our works are not sinless and our works are not perfect- we are saved by the finished Work of Jesus Christ.

And that is why Jesus had to be born, and that is why He had to live life as a Man for 33 years here on this earth- so that He could be tempted in all points like as we are- yet never violating the Law one single time in either thought, word, or deed- so that He could literally earn and be entitled to that perfect spotless Righteousness that the Law promised to all those who would keep it perfectly and continuously.

So that is where Jesus got the spotless Righteousness that is imputed to us by Faith after our sins are forgiven, and that is why Jesus had to be baptized and that is why Jesus had to be circumcised.

So I ask you this morning. Have all your sins- past, present, and future been forgiven? Has God's Justice against your sins been forever satisfied or is God's Wrath breathing down your neck? Are you a recipient of God's Mercy or God's Fury? Have you been made Righteous? Has the sinless, spotless Righteousness of Jesus been imputed to you by the agency of Faith alone or are you still trying to earn your way into Heaven by keeping the Law or by partaking of the Sacraments? Is Jesus your Savior or your Judge? Come to Jesus today.

Let's come pray.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.