

THE CIRCUMCISION AND PRESENTATION OF JESUS LUKE 02:21–35

Introduction

It was time for the child to be dedicated and offered up for God's keeping and care. On the eighth day the child was circumcised. The parents took the child to the temple, and in the temple they came across a man named Simeon. Just who Simeon was is not known. Some think he was a priest, but Scripture does not say. All we know is what is recorded here. He was a man who loved God very much, so much that God was able to use him in a most magnificent way. He used Simeon to proclaim one of the greatest messages of all time: the events and fate of the child Messiah's life.

- I. The naming of Jesus (v. 21)
- II. The unexpected observance of the legal ceremonies (vv. 22-23)
- III. The deliberate choice of God to have a poor family bear His Son (v. 24).
- IV. Simeon, a man who walked close to God (v. 25-27).
- V. The child was God's salvation (v. 28-33).
- VI. The child was to cause the rise and fall of many (v. 34).
- VII. The child's fate was sealed (v. 34-35).

I. *Luke 02:21 Naming of Jesus Christ*

There was the unusual naming of the child. The child was named by God Himself.

1. The child Jesus was named by God before He was conceived in the womb (Lk. 1:31).
2. The name Jesus (iesous) means Saviour or He will save. The Hebrew form of the name is Joshua (yasha), which means Jehovah is salvation or He is the Saviour. The idea is that of deliverance, of being saved from some terrible disaster that leads to destruction (see Jn. 3:16). (See Lk. 9:23; Rom. 8:3; Ga1. 1: 4; Heb. 2:14-18; 7:25.)

1 Tim 2:3-6 *This is good, and pleases God our Saviour, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men — the testimony given in its proper time.*

Titus 3:4-7 *But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.*

II. *Luke 02:22–23 Jesus Christ Fulfils the Law*

There was the unexpected observance of the legal ceremonies. There were three legal ceremonies which Jesus underwent.

1. There was the ceremony of circumcision. (See *Circumcision*, Phil. 03:03)
2. There was the ceremony of purification. This was a ceremony Mary had to go through. After the birth of a boy child, a woman was considered unclean for forty days (eighty for a girl child). She could work around the home and engage in normal activities, but she could not take part in religious ceremonies. She was religiously, that is, ceremonially, unclean. After a woman's forty or eighty days were up, she was to make an offering in the temple (Lev. 12:1-8).
3. There was the ceremony of dedication to the Lord (v. 23; see Exo. 13:2, 12, 15; Lev. 27:6; Num. 18:15-16). A male child was presented (dedicated) in the temple when the family was close to Jerusalem.

Why would Jesus, the Son of God, be subjected to the legal observances of the law? He was not a stranger to the covenants of God (circumcision). He had created the covenants Himself. He was not lacking in commitment (the Dedication Ceremony). He was God Himself, the One to whom all babies were dedicated, yet He was subjected to all the legal requirements. Why? Very simply...

Gal 4:4-5 *But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.*

Heb 2:17-18 *For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.*

Mat 5:17 *“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”*

PHILIPPIANS 03:03 CIRCUMCISION

Before Christ, circumcision was the physical sign that a man was a follower of the true God. It was the sign that a man believed the promises that God had made to Abraham and Israel (see Gen. 17:10-14; Rom. 4:11). God never intended circumcision to have any value other than being a sign. It was not to bring righteousness to any man — not even to Abraham (Rom. 4:9-10). It was given only as a sign — a sign of the faith that a man already had in God's promises. Righteousness was imputed to the man because he believed God's promises; then the man was circumcised as a sign of his faith in God (see Rom. 4:11).

However, many abused God's purpose for circumcision.

1. Some made circumcision a substitute for true righteousness. A man was thought to be safe and secure in the arms of God if he was circumcised. Believing God and loving men had little to do with being a child of God. Many forgot the circumcision of a pure heart and became Jews of the circumcision in name only. Circumcision became merely an external and physical sign.
2. Some used circumcision as a way to divide and categorize people. A great wall of division was thrown up around the uncircumcised (cp. Acts 10:1; 1 Sam.17:26, 36; 2 Sam. 1:20). Any man who was uncircumcised was thought to be cut off and far off, not only from those thought to be the people of God (the Jews and the circumcised) but from God Himself. (See Acts 10:1-33.) An uncircumcised man was looked upon with bitter contempt. In the mind of the Jew, God was thought to love only Israel, despising and rejecting all other people (the Gentile nations).
3. God has done away with circumcision as a sign of righteousness since Christ has come (Gal. 5:6; 6:15; Col. 2:11). Righteousness is now of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter of rules and regulations (see Rom. 2:25-29; 4:8-12, 23-25). The truly righteous man is the man who is God's inwardly — the man whose spirit has been recreated into the very nature of God. God's very own righteous nature is implanted into the very nature of man when he is born again. A man born again by the Spirit of God is God's "new creation" (Jn. 3:3f; 1 Pet. 1:20; 2 Pet. 1:4). □

III. *Luke 02:24 Offering of the Poor*

There was the deliberate choice of God to have a poor family bear His Son. Note that Mary offered two pigeons. This was the offering of the poor. Rich people were required to offer a lamb and a pigeon. Therefore, God chose a poor family to rear His only Son in an ordinary home without any luxuries.

Thought 1. No matter what we have to bear in life, Christ has already borne it - even poverty. He knows the suffering we undergo; therefore, He is able to strengthen and carry us through the suffering.

Christ needed to experience every situation, condition, and trial of man in order to become the Perfect Sympathizer or Saviour. For this reason, He experienced the most humiliating experiences possible. He experienced...

- being born to an unwed mother (Mt. 1:18-19).
- being born in a stable, the worst of conditions (Lk. 2:7).
- being born to poor parents (Lk. 2:24).
- having his life threatened as a baby (Mt. 2:13f).
- being the cause of unimaginable sorrow (Mt. 2:16f).

- having to be moved and shifted as a baby (Mt. 2:13f).
- being reared in a despicable place. Nazareth (Lk. 2:39).
- having His father die during His youth (Mt. 13:53-58).
- having to support His mother and family (Mt. 13:53-58).
- having no home, not even a place to lay His head (Mt. 8:20; Lk. 9:58).
- being hated and opposed by religionists (Mk. 14:1-2).
- being charged with insanity (Mk. 3:21).
- being charged with demon possession (Mk. 3:22).
- being opposed by His own family (Mk. 3:31-32).
- being rejected, hated, and opposed by listeners (Mt. 13:53-58; Lk. 4:28-29).
- being betrayed by a close friend (Mk. 14:10-11, 18).
- being left alone, rejected, and forsaken by all of His friends (Mk. 14:50).
- being tried before the high court of the land on the charge of treason (Jn. 18:33).
- being executed by crucifixion, the worst possible death (Jn. 19:16f).

Note that each of these experiences reaches the depth of humiliation. Christ stooped to the lowest point of human experience in every condition in order to become the Perfect Sympathizer (Saviour). He can now identify with and feel for any person's circumstances.

Heb 2:16-18 For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

Heb 4:15-16 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

IV. Luke 02:25–27 The Devout Simeon

Simeon was a man who walked closely with God. He walked so closely that God was able to use him in a most magnificent way to encourage Joseph and Mary. Five things are said about him personally.

1. Simeon was a righteous and devout man. The word righteous — (*dikaios*) means well-behaved, living as one should live. Simeon was a man who treated other people as he should: justly.

The word devout (eulabes) means cautious and careful in relation to God. It means reverence for God, being pious. Simeon was very careful in his relation toward God.

2. Simeon was a man who looked for the coming of the Messiah (See *Christ the Messiah*, Mt. 1:18). This is what is meant by “the consolation of Israel.” Faithful believers among the Jews felt that Israel could find consolation only in the Messiah. They longed and ached with all hope and patience for His coming. Joseph of Arimathea was another example of one who “was waiting for the kingdom of God” (Mk. 15:43)

Thought 1. The world can find consolation only in the coming of Christ.

Titus 2:11-14 *For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope — the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.*

Thought 2. Believers must long for the Messiah, ache with all hope and patience for His return.

3. Simeon was a man led by the Holy Spirit. The idea seems to be that the Spirit was upon him continually. In most instances throughout the Old Testament the Spirit only came upon men for special service. It is not said that the Spirit abode upon them continually; however, the Spirit does seem to have rested upon Simeon continually. This shows just how closely Simeon was living to God. He must have been a very special man, who held God ever so dear to his heart and whom God held ever so close to His heart.
4. Simeon was a man who was given an unusual promise. Apparently, Simeon was constantly studying the Scriptures, in particular searching the prophecies concerning the coming salvation of the Messiah (1 Pet. 1:10). At some point, the Holy Spirit revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah. Just think how closely Simeon must have lived to God! He was unquestionably a very special person to God.
5. Simeon was a man who saw and held the Messiah. Note that Simeon was again led by the Spirit; he was led into the temple. This was the day for which he had longed and ached, the day he was to see and embrace the Messiah. A first-born son was always taken to the temple to be dedicated to the Lord. Immediately, Simeon saw that this child was different from all the others; he recognized the child as the Christ-child. He took the child up into his arms and proclaimed Him to be the long-awaited Messiah.

Thought 1. The point to note about Simeon is his closeness to God. He was a man who stands as a dynamic example of strong dedication. Because of his strong dedication, God was able to bless Simeon beyond imagination.

Psa 31:23 *Love the Lord, all his saints! The Lord preserves the faithful, but the proud he pays back in full.*

1 Pet 1:8 Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy.

Jude 1:21 Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.

Rev 2:19 I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.

MATHEW 01:18 CHRIST (CHRISTOS)

The words Christ (Christos) and Messiah are the same word. Messiah is the Hebrew word and Christ is the Greek word. Both words refer to the same person and mean the same thing: the Anointed One. The Messiah is the Anointed One of God. Mathew says Jesus "is called Christ" (Mt. 1:16); that is, He is recognized as the Anointed One of God, the Messiah Himself.

In the day of Jesus Christ, people feverishly panted for the coming of the long-promised Messiah. The weight of life was harsh, hard, and impoverishing. Under the Romans, the people felt that God could not wait much longer to fulfil His promise. Such longings for deliverance left the people gullible. Many arose who claimed to be the Messiah and led the trusting followers into rebellion against the Roman State. The insurrectionist Barabbas, who was set free in the place of Jesus at Jesus' trial, is an example (Mk. 15:60f)

The Messiah was thought to be several things.

1. *Nationally*, He was to be the leader from David's line who would free the Jewish state as an independent nation and lead it to be the greatest nation the world had ever known.
2. *Militarily*, He was to be a great military leader who would lead Jewish armies victoriously over all the world.
3. *Religiously*, He was to be a supernatural figure straight from God who would bring righteousness over all the earth.
4. *Personally*, He was to be the One who would bring peace to the whole world.

Jesus Christ accepted the title of Messiah on three different occasions (Mt. 16:17; Mk. 14:61; Jn. 4:26). The name "Jesus" shows Him to be man. The name "Christ" shows Him to be God's Anointed One, God's very own Son. Christ is Jesus' official title. It identifies Him officially as Prophet (Deu. 18:15-19), Priest (Psa. 110:4), and King (2 Sam. 7:12-13). These three officials were always anointed with oil, a symbol of the Holy Spirit who was to perfectly anoint the Christ, the Messiah (Mt. 3:16; Mk. 1:10-11; Lk. 3:21-22; Jn. 1:32-33). □

V. *Luke 02:28–33 Jesus Christ, God’s Salvation*

The child was God’s salvation. Once Simeon had embraced the Messiah, he broke out into song. The song is called the *Nunc Dimittis*, again being known by the opening words of the song in Latin. Note several points.

1. The child was God’s salvation; He was to be the source of peace for the world. Simeon had “seen and embraced” the Messiah, God’s salvation. Therefore, he was now ready to die in peace. Note that He believed and trusted God — all of God’s promises. He praised God for fulfilling His Word “as you have promised.” It was because of God’s faithfulness that he was ready to die. He knew that he would live on “with his fathers” forever.

John 14:27 *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”*

John 16:33 *“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”*

2. The child was the One appointed to be God’s salvation. He was appointed and prepared “by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge” (Acts 2:23). Note also this was the confession of Simeon. He confessed that the child was God’s salvation.

Thought 1. Everyone must confess that the child Jesus is God’s salvation, through whom God saves the world.

Mat 10:32 *“Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven.”*

1 John 4:15 *If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God.*

3. The child, God’s salvation, was prepared for all people. Simeon saw that God’s salvation was not for any one people or nation or group. The Messiah had come to save all men. Anyone could now be saved, no matter who he was or what he had done. Prejudice and favouritism are unknown to God. He is not willing that any should perish.

Rom 1:16 *I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.*

2 Pet 3:9 *The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*

4. The child, God’s salvation, was to be a light to the Gentiles, to the unbelievers of the world. The child came to be the Light of the world. This simply means that He came to be the Revelation of God, to reveal the way, the truth, and the life to men.

Jn 14:6 *Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”*

John 8:12 *When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."*

5. The child, God's salvation, was to be the glory of Israel, of true believers. The Messiah was to be the glory of all Israelites (Jews) who truly believed. In fact, He was to be the glory of all who believed, no matter what nationality. The reason is clearly given by Scripture.

a. The believer is justified, made righteous.

Isa 45:25 *But in the Lord all the descendants of Israel will be found righteous and will exult.*

b. The believer is saved to live with God eternally.

Isa 60:15, 18-19 *"Although you have been forsaken and hated, with no one travelling through, I will make you the everlasting pride and the joy of all generations. No longer will violence be heard in your land, nor ruin or destruction within your borders, but you will call your walls Salvation and your gates Praise. The sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you, for the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory."*

6. The parents marvelled at the predictions. The predictions would amaze anyone, but they were given for an additional reason. Joseph and Mary needed to be assured and encouraged. Their need was only natural. Imagine what they had been through and were yet to go through because of the child (See *The Birth of Jesus — Demands on Mary and Joseph*, Mt. 1: 18-25). God saw to it that they were strengthened in this experience.

MATHEW 01:18–25
THE BIRTH OF JESUS CHRIST
AND THE DEMANDS ON MARY AND JOSEPH

Jesus' birth was one of the most convulsive and disturbing events in all history (see Lk. 2:1-24).

1. There was Mary's pregnancy — the idea of her being an unwed mother (Mt. 1:18; Lk. 1:26f). Who of that day would ever believe her story? Required was a willingness to be available to God regardless of embarrassment and the opinions of family, friends, and neighbours.
2. There was Joseph's discovery of Mary's pregnancy (Mt.1:19). The shock of Mary's infidelity and of personal embarrassment was more than Joseph could bear (Mt. 1:20). Required was a willingness to forget self completely.
3. There was the child, the Son of God Himself, being born in a smelly manger (Mt. 1:25; Lk. 2:1f). Required was a willingness to be humble.

4. There was the family having to be uprooted and moved to a foreign nation, Egypt (Mt. 2:13f). Required was a willingness to obey at any cost.
5. There was the slaughter of all children under two years of age (Mt. 2:16f). The heavy weight of feeling some responsibility was bound to attack Joseph and Mary. Required was a willingness on their part to bear anything.
6. There was the visit of the wise men showing that the foreign relationships of nations were affected (Mt. 2:1f). Required was a willingness to bear the pressure of responsibility and the demands of being in the limelight.
7. There was the uproar of Herod's household traumatically affecting the lives of both Joseph and Mary (Mt. 2:7-8, 15-16, 22). Required was a willingness to stand against all odds. □

VI. Luke 02:34 *Jesus Christ, The Cause of the Rise and Fall of Many*

The child was to cause the rise and fall of many. The child was to be what the Scripture calls the stone of stumbling and the chief cornerstone.

Many would stumble and fall over Him. They would not notice, look, study, prefer, choose, believe, or trust Him and the salvation He was to bring. They would simply choose another way other than God. Therefore, they would stumble and fall over Him just as they would stumble over a stone lying in their path.

Many would rise because of Him. They would take notice, choose, and believe Him and the salvation He was to bring. Therefore, He would become their foundation, their cornerstone.

Thought 1. Decisively, Jesus Christ causes every man to make a choice. A man either rejects the Messiah, God's salvation, and falls (eternally); or he accepts and he rises (eternally). (See *Jesus Christ, the Stone*, Mt. 21:42; *Judgement — Crushing Stone*, Mt 21:44)

Isa 8:13-1 *"The Lord Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, he is the one you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread, and he will be a sanctuary; but for both houses of Israel he will be a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall. And for the people of Jerusalem he will be a trap and a snare. Many of them will stumble; they will fall and be broken, they will be snared and captured."*

1 Pet 2: 7-8 *Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone" and, "A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they disobey the message — which is also what they were destined for.*

MATHEW 21:42 JESUS CHRIST, HEAD CORNERSTONE

*Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures: ‘The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvellous in our eyes’?” **Mathew 21:42***

Christ is the Head cornerstone (Lk. 2:34). This is a quotation from Psa. 118:22-23 which was recognized as a Messianic prophecy. The Messiah was to be the Head Cornerstone who was to begin building the Kingdom of God and who was to support all other stones or leaders who came later. The religious leaders standing around Christ would know that He was referring to the Messiah (Isa. 28:16; Dan. 2:34; Zec. 3:9).

But note the prophecy: the stone is to be rejected at first. It is considered unsuitable, useless for the building, so the builders do not allow the stone to be a part of the building. It is cast aside and treated as undesirable.

However, the great Architect overrules the builders. He raises the stone from the graveyard of rejected stones and exalts it to the position of Head cornerstone, the stone which supports all other stones and which holds the building of God’s kingdom together (Phil. 2:9-11; Eph. 2:20.)

The symbolism of the Head cornerstone says at least two significant things.

1. The cornerstone is the first stone laid. All other stones are placed after it. It is the pre-eminent stone in time. So it is with Christ; He is the first of God’s new movement.

=> Christ is the Author of salvation. All others are the readers of the story.

***Heb 2:10** In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering.*

=> Christ is the Source of eternal salvation, of our faith. All who trust and obey Him are partakers of that Source.

***Heb 5:9** And, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.*

***Heb 12:2** Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

=> Christ is the Alpha and Omega — the beginning and the end. All others come after Him and are in between Him.

***Rev 1:8** “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.” (see 21:6; 22:13)*

=> Christ is the Forerunner, the One who went before us into the very presence of God. All others enter God's presence after Him.

Heb 6:19-20 We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.

2. The cornerstone is the supportive stone. All other stones are placed upon it and held up by it. They all rest upon it. It is the pre-eminent stone in position and power. So it is with Christ; He is the support and power, the Foundation of God's new movement.

=> Christ is the Head Cornerstone (Capstone), the only true foundation upon which man can build. All who are not laid upon Him will crumble.

1 Cor 3:11 For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.

=> Christ is the Chief Cornerstone upon which all others are fitly formed together. All who wish to be fitly formed together have to be laid upon Him.

Eph 2:20-22 Built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

=> Christ is the Living Stone upon which all others are built. It is upon Him that we are built up into a spiritual house. All others have to be built upon Him if they wish to live and have their spiritual sacrifice accepted by God.

1 Pet 2:4-5 As you come to him, the living Stone — rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him — you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. □

MATHEW 21:44

JUDGMENT; STUMBLING STONE; CRUSHING STONE

“He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed.” Mathew 21:44

Christ said two types of people are doomed.

1. The people who stumble over Christ, the Head cornerstone of God, are doomed. Many who stood around Christ in that day stumbled and many stumble today.

Many cannot believe that God actually sent His Son into the world. The idea that God would humiliate Himself that much is beyond understanding, so they refuse to believe. The belief that Christ was a great teacher is acceptable to them; but acknowledging Him to be more than a man, to be the Son of God who was to die for the sins of the world, is beyond them. Therefore, they stumble over the cornerstone, the very foundation which God has laid for the salvation of man. They stumble and fall over who He is, and they are shattered and broken (Lk. 2:34).

2. The men who oppose Christ over His being the Head cornerstone are doomed. Some actively oppose Christ and His kingdom. They say and teach that He is not really the Son of God. Neither He nor any other human being could ever be the Son of God. A good man, yes, but never the Son of God who has been exalted to the right hand of God. Christ says the Son (He Himself) will crush those who oppose Him, those who lead others astray trying to stamp out belief in Him and His kingdom. Severe judgment, holy vengeance shall straighten out all the injustices and sins of men. □

VII. *Luke 02:34–35 Death of Jesus Christ – Humanism*

The child's fate was sealed. The child was to be opposed and eventually killed. He was the "sign that will be spoken against."

Thought 1. Christ was a sign of both God's love and judgment. It is this that causes men to react. Men want a god that brings only enough law and morality to give order to society. They want a god that allows them to live as they desire, not a God who demands total self-denial and obedience (See *Cross and Discipleship*, Lk. 9:23). They want a god of indulging love, not of sacrificial love; a god of license, not of demanding love. Therefore, when Christ is set before men as the Messiah of self-denying love and obedience, they react. Why? Because if they disobey Him and fail to live sacrificial lives, they bring judgment upon themselves.

Thought 2. Within every society, Christ and His genuine followers are spoken against with varying degrees of reaction and persecution. The speaking against ranges all the way from simply ignoring believers to killing them (martyrdom). There is...

- ignoring
- ridiculing
- abusing
- hating
- imprisoning
- murdering
- persecuting
- slandering

Note the words spoken to Mary, "And a sword will pierce your own soul too." This is a reference to the sorrow she was to experience at the cross, seeing her Son, the only begotten Son of God, rejected and killed by men (Jn. 19:25-27).

Note also, the purpose for the child's death: to reveal the inner thoughts of man's heart.

Thought 1. Man either sees the love of God and surrenders to the saving grace of God, or else he looks upon the cross as a repulsive sight and rejects the saving grace

of God. He either sees Christ's dying for his sins and receives the forgiveness of God offered by the cross, or else he recoils from the thought of sin within himself and turns from the forgiveness of the cross.

1 Cor 1:18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

Rom 2:4 Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?

Isa 5:24 Therefore, as tongues of fire lick up straw and as dry grass sinks down in the flames, so their roots will decay and their flowers blow away like dust; for they have rejected the law of the Lord Almighty and spurned the word of the Holy One of Israel.

Jer 6:10 To whom can I speak and give warning? Who will listen to me? Their ears are closed so they cannot hear. The word of the Lord is offensive to them; they find no pleasure in it.

Jer 8:9 The wise will be put to shame; they will be dismayed and trapped. Since they have rejected the word of the Lord, what kind of wisdom do they have?

Zec 7:12 They made their hearts as hard as flint and would not listen to the law or to the words that the Lord Almighty had sent by his Spirit through the earlier prophets. So the Lord Almighty was very angry. ■

LUKE 09:23 CROSS AND DISCIPLESHIP

*Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." **Luke 09:23***

People in Jesus' day knew what it meant to "take up" a cross. They saw scores of criminals bear the cross to the place where they were to be executed, and they witnessed scores of crucifixions, some even by the side of the roads that led in and out of the cities.

The cross does not mean merely bearing one's particular hardship in life, such as poor health, abuse, unemployment, invalid parents, an unsaved spouse, a wayward child. The cross is always an instrument of death, not just an object to carry or bear. The Christian is to die mentally and actively. He is to deny himself daily. He is to let the mind of Christ, the mind of humbling himself to the point of death, be in him and fill his thoughts every day (Phil. 2:5-8; 2 Cor. 10:3-5). He is to put his will, his desires, his wants, his ambitions to death. In their stead, he is to follow Jesus and to do His will all day long. Note this is not negative, passive behaviour. It takes positive, active behaviour to will, to deny self, to take up one's cross, to follow Christ. A person has to act, work, get to it, be diligent, consistent, and enduring in order to die to self.

There are several ways the believer dies to self. Romans 6:11-13 spells out the ways as clearly as they can be.

Rom 6:11-13 *In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. (see Rom. 6:2-10)*

1. The believer reckons or counts himself crucified with Christ.

Rom 6:11a *In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin.*

Rom 6:6 *For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin.*

Gal 2:20 *I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

Gal 5:24 *Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.*

2. The believer reckons or counts himself dead to sin, but alive to God.

Rom 6:11 *In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.*

1 Pet 4:2 *As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God.*

3. The believer does not let sin reign in his body.

Rom 6:12 *Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires.*

Col 3:5 *Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.*

4. The believer does not yield the parts of his body to sin, as instruments of wickedness.

Rom 6:13a *Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness.*

Rom 8:13 *For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.*

5. The believer yields himself to God — as much as those who are alive from the dead are yielded to God.

Rom 6:13b *But rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life.*

Rom 12:1 *Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship.*

Rom 13:14 *Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.*

6. The believer yields his body members as instruments of righteousness.

Rom 6:13c *And offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.*

Gal 5:16 *So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.*

It should be noted that one's hardship or burden can bring a person to the place where the Lord can deal with him. It is then that the hardship becomes the cross and denial of self that Jesus is talking about. With an act of self-denial, the Christian can then count or reckon himself alive to God (Rom. 6:13). He can then follow Jesus. This is an act which can be described as committing all that one is and has to Christ. It is an act that needs to be repeated every day (see Mt. 10:38). □