

KAILUA CHRISTIAN CHURCH (UCC)
LUKE 2:29-32
Title: Missions - by Tradition or Conviction?
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Sunday, October 23, 2022

“Luke 2:29-32”

29 “Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss^[a] your servant in peace.

30 For my eyes have seen your salvation, **31** which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:

32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.”

There are many endeavors that constitute the life of the local church. Take a look at your church calendar and it is filled with events. Take a look at your church budget and it is filled with expenses. Yet, we all know that we only have so many hours in the day and only so much money in the bank. A local church - no matter how much it may be thriving and flourishing – has limited time and limited resources. Each year, a local church like the one you are a part of must decide how to steward its days and money. Each year, the church must decide on a calendar of events - both the regular and the occasional. What time is Sunday Service going to be every Sunday? Are we going to have Sunday School classes and mid-week Bible studies? Will there be a Thanksgiving potluck and Christmas party? Is the campus going to be used for Awana Club or Vacation Bible School this year? Are fellowship meals going to take place on a weekly, monthly, or quarterly basis? Each year, the church must also decide on how to steward its money – it must decide on a budget. And trust me, as a pastor and elder, I have been part of several teams that have had to decide on how to allocate its funds, and it is not always easy. People don't always agree on how the church's money must be spent. And when it comes to both the calendar and the budget of the church, every leadership team - with the input of the people - must distinguish between which endeavors are out of tradition and which ones are out of conviction. By tradition, I mean those endeavors of the church that have customarily been a part of the church life of the church by custom. The Bible doesn't command or prohibit it, and the church does it simply because it has done it. Whether a tradition continues to be a part of the calendar or budget is not a hill to die on and remains up to the discretion or opinion of the leadership of the church. But endeavors that are from conviction are different. By conviction, I mean those endeavors of the church that are a part of the church's life because the Bible says it must be a part of the church life. Whether such an endeavor continues to be a part of the calendar or budget is indeed a hill to die on. It is there not because “it's always been done that way” but because God commanded it to be so in His Word. And one of those is the endeavor of missions.

The majority of local churches that I've been a part of are, in some way, shape, or form, invested in missions work. Some engage in missions by deployment - they send out actual long-term missionaries or send out short-term missions' teams to different places in the world (both

local and international). Some engage in missions by fiscal contribution - they support either different missions' organizations or missionary families. I'm glad that churches do this. But the question always arises: are they going to keep doing it, or will this next year be the year that they cease? What determines the outcome? It all comes down to whether a church sees the missions' endeavor as a good tradition or a biblical conviction. And the point of this message is this: that the church must engage in, and support missions is rooted not in good tradition, but in biblical conviction. Only if the church has the proper conviction about missions will the church engage in the endeavor of missions properly. A church that sees missions as a good tradition is at risk of ceasing missionary engagement or support when money gets tight or when time becomes constrained.

And so, if a local church is going to support missionaries the right way, and support the right missionaries or missions' institutions, the church must have a proper conviction about missions. And the church's conviction about missions is rooted in none other than a proper conviction about Christ - why He came and who He came for. The call to send or support missions work around the world is rooted in the church's view of Jesus Christ. How a church sees Jesus shapes how the church engages in missionary work.

We must see Jesus Christ for who He really is and who He came for. And if we're not sure if we're seeing Him correctly, then take a look at Luke 2:29-32 and study the way Simeon saw him.

Simeon is somewhat of an obscure figure in biblical history. Outside of a few passages in Luke, nothing else is said about him in the Bible. He was not a man esteemed by society necessarily - at least, the Bible never says so. He was a man who lived the entirety of his life as a Jew under Roman rule and oppression. By the time Jesus was born, he was a man close to death. But he was a man who saw Jesus correctly. And the reason why his interaction with the infant Jesus is recorded in the Scriptures is because it is the way we need to see Jesus, and it explains the work of missions. Remember that missionary work is described in the book of Acts, and the book of Acts is connected to the book of Luke. While Acts is a description of the church's missionary work, the book of Luke explains where it all came from. And when Simeon the prophet saw the infant Jesus and took him into his arms, he saw the very reality that would set the precedence and tone for all missions' work. When Simeon saw Jesus, he was convicted about two truths - two truths that any faithful church must be convicted of.

First, when Simeon saw Jesus, he was convicted that Jesus was the Christ who came to save people from their sins and from eternal judgment. He says in verse 30-31: "For my eyes have seen Your Salvation, which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples." Despite the hardships that he may have had, peace filled his heart when he saw the infant Jesus. He told God that he was now ready to die, as his heart was relieved of the turmoil and tension that it was experiencing. Why? Because, upon looking at Jesus, he realized that God had sent this Jesus into the world to accomplish a salvation that God had prepared the world for. Simeon was convicted that Jesus had come not to fix people's financial problems or Israel's political

issues in this life. He was convicted, through his knowledge of the Scriptures, that Jesus had come to save. He knew that humanity was in a dire state. He knew that humanity was dead in the sight of God, but that this Jesus alone had come to offer salvation. Only when we as Christians – we as a church - are truly convicted that Christ came to save people - will we engage in missions properly. Missions work is not about mere philanthropy. It's not something that we do to support our friends to show them that we love them (though we might). We send and support missionaries because we know that people around the world are dying and at risk of eternal punishment, and that Jesus Christ came to seek and save them. Why do we support missionaries? Because we know that the message they proclaim and the ministry they bear reveals Christ, and such a revelation can save people.

Second, when Simeon saw Jesus, he was convicted that Jesus was the Christ who came for all. He says in verse 32: "A light of revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel." Not only did Christ come to save, but He came for all. Remember that Simeon was a Jewish man living under Roman oppression. Many in his day were awaiting a Messiah that would free Israel from Roman rule. There was a growing anti-Gentile sentiment in Israel during that time, propagated by the Pharisees and other religious elites. The last thing many in the Jewish community thought about during the day was Gentile salvation. But when Simeon saw Jesus, he was convicted (from his knowledge of Scripture) that Jesus came for all peoples of all nations and ethnicities. He knew that the baby he was holding would suffer and die for the sins not just of believing Jews, but for all people from every nation and people. He knew that Jesus came not just for Israel, but that he came for the Gentiles. Simeon was deeply convicted of the truth of a promise that has been fulfilled in the last 2000 years. The reason why you and I here in Hawaii are in church together is because God always had a plan to bring salvation through Christ to all ethnicities to the ends of the earth. Why should a church support missionaries around the world? Why should a church send missionaries to different parts of the world? It's because of the truth that Simeon knew that we must as well - that Jesus came for all those people to whom those missionaries are sent. It's as simple as this. Whether the church brings the gospel to the ends of the earth is not an option; it is a mandate rooted in the very purpose of Christ's death and resurrection.

Let the church engage, then, in missions not out of tradition but out of conviction. Let the church be convicted that Christ came to save. Let the church be convicted that Christ came to all. Will your church's missions endeavors this year reflect that you view Christ the way Simeon did? AMEN.