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**E**lisa Ezquierdo, a stunning, promising child who fell through the cracks of the U.S. child welfare system, was murdered by her mother.

Elisa was doted over by her father, Gustavo, and guaranteed educational support through 12 grades of Montessori school by her sponsor, Prince Michael of Greece. Yet she was hated and systematically abused by her mother.

Elisa's father took parenting classes and enrolled her in a Montessori school. She was his life. He called Elisa his princess. Every morning he ironed her dress and put her beautiful hair into braids and pigtails. She was a favorite in school. Beautiful, radiant.

Greece's Prince Michael says she was a "lively, charming, beautiful girl." He brought her stuffed animals and clothes.

But her mother responded differently. She used Elisa's head to mop the floor. She smashed Elisa's head against a cement wall. Made her eat her own feces. Elisa's tragic, shameful

HEAVEN  
UNEARTHING  
PEACE

death in December 1995 stirs outrage. There was no part of the 6-year-old's body that was not cut or bruised.<sup>1</sup>

How could one little girl bring out such joy and affection and yet such cruelty and hatred?

This is a question we can ask, too, about another child in another time: the Christ-child. The words of Simeon strike a different note from the nice little Christmas story we're usually accustomed to thinking about. After the angels sang, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!" (Luke 2:14, NKJV), Simeon stated that the Christ-child would bring both trouble and joy: "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel.' And Joseph and His mother marveled at those things which were spoken of Him. Then Simeon blessed them, and said to

Mary His mother, ‘Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against (yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed’” (vss. 29-35, NKJV).

The Christ-child would be a sign to be disputed. Spoken against. Someone argued over. People would take different sides. This child would elicit opposing responses.

Here’s a child who would bring out the best or the worst in people. This would be true not only for Christ’s own immediate family, but also for the human family as a whole. Jesus would be the great moral and spiritual divider. A point of spiritual moral convergence and pressure. It is never comfortable to face the real implications of Christ.

We witness this divergence in the contrast between the shepherds and the priests, the wise men and Herod. We see it in Christ’s ministry and among His disciples. Some loved Him with a passion. Others hated Him with a passion. There’s no difference today. Jesus still brings the best or the worst out of people.

Simeon informed us all that God’s purpose in sending Jesus is to test our thoughts and purposes. So ““that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed”” he says (Luke 2:35, NKJV). The realm of thoughts includes our values, our attitudes, our motives, our

outlook—what we really want and are deep down inside. This includes our thoughts about God. Our thoughts about our need of salvation, how it works, whether we need it, want it. Our thoughts about everyday things like money, power, sex, relationships, marriage, the authority of God’s Word—every sphere and aspect of life.

Jesus comes to us, not with a child’s appeal, but with the everlasting man’s authority: to force us to difficult decisions, to compel us to review and reshape the values of our living, to renounce pride or greed or lust of power, and to accept instead the imperatives of both His character and law of service.

We are compelled to take a stand. We cannot meet Jesus and ever be the same again—either way, for good or for bad.

We glimpse what Simeon had in mind in John’s record of a particularly low and pivotal point in Christ’s preaching ministry: “Many of His disciples, when they heard this, said, ‘This is a hard saying; who can understand it?’ When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples complained about this, He said to them, ‘Does this offend you?’” (John 6:60, 61, NKJV).

A lot of people, offended, turned their backs on Jesus that day. The Greek word for “hard saying” does not mean hard to understand. It means hard to tolerate. Hard to accept. Hard

to stomach. Hard sayings of doctrine, of moral values, of lifestyle matters. Hard sayings about interpersonal relationships, about ethics, about authority, about one’s need of salvation and where it is found.

From that time, many of His disciples walked no more with Him.

As long as Jesus said nice, comfortable things, people hung around. They were quick to leave, though, when what they heard was so radical that they would not accept it.

Brain researchers identify four quadrants of the brain and suggest their implications for choice and change: frontal left, lower left, frontal right, lower right. They believe that most of us are born with an innate biochemical preference for processing information in one or two of these quadrants. But we don’t have to be stuck for life with that preference. We can choose differently if we decide to.<sup>2</sup>

Scripture implies that every one of us has a heart preference that tends us toward important moral and spiritual inclinations, values, choices, being. “This is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in

God” (John 3:19-21, NKJV).

The person and teachings of Jesus uncover our heart preference, which way we’re truly leaning, morally, spiritually, with reference to Him. What we’re really like inside. The good news is that we’re never stuck with this if there is need for change. We can choose differently! That is why Jesus was born—to press every one of us on this important level.

Simeon’s words about Christ go beyond the mere revealing of the thoughts of our heart. They imply that Jesus will ultimately bring moral and spiritual decision one way or another. Some to the point of collapse and others to what in the Greek text refers to as “resurrection.”

Elisa brought loving responsibility out of her father Gustavo and hateful dysfunction from her mother Awilda. So with Jesus. Some will come, and some leave. He will bring out the best in some and the worst in others. Jesus will ever press us to choose Him over everything and anything else.

Heaven unearthing peace! Jesus has come to bring peace on Earth—but only after He has upset our equilibrium and pressed us with the reality of Himself and His claims on us through His Word.

#### REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> *Time* (December 11, 1995); *Newsweek*, (December 11, 1995).

<sup>2</sup> Arlene Taylor, “Why We Hate Change or Love It!” *Adventist Review* (December 1995), pp. 17-19.