

Simeon's Song "Nunc-Dimittis"

Luke 2:25-33

Pastor John Miller

I want to read this text beginning in verse 25. I want you to follow with me in your Bibles. It starts, "And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem. His name was Simeon, and the same man was just and devout, and he was waiting for the consolation of the comfort of Israel. And the Holy Spirit was upon him, and it was revealed unto him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he should see the Lord's Christ. And he came by the Spirit and to the temple."

"And when the parents brought in the child Jesus for to do to Him after the custom of the law, they then took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said, 'Lord, now let thy serve and depart in peace according to thy word, for my eyes have seen thy salvation which thou has prepared before the face of all the people, a light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of thy people, Israel.' And Joseph and His mother marveled at those things which are spoken of Him, and Simeon blessed them," that is Mary and Joseph, "and said unto Mary, His mother, 'Behold, this child is sent for the fall and the rising again of many in Israel, for a sign which shall not be spoken against. And yes, a sword shall pierce through thine own soul also that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.'"

We come this morning to the third song in the Gospel of Luke that has been called the Gospel that sings. It's the singing gospel. We've seen Mary's song, we've seen Zachariah's song, and this morning, we looked together at Simeon's song. His song is called The Nunc Dimittis, that's Latin for verse 29, "Now depart or dismiss thy servant in peace. Jesus the Savior now is born." I want you to get the setting for this Song of Simeon. Go back to verse 11. "Unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a savior," says the angel, "Which is Christ the Lord." So, Jesus Christ has already been born in Bethlehem. So now the scene shifts from Bethlehem to Jerusalem, from a manger and now to a temple. And Jesus is now eight days old, and Mary and Joseph bring Jesus into the temple. Back up with me to verse 21, and I'll point out the context there.

Jesus is then, in verse 21, circumcised and given His name. All male baby Jews were circumcised at eight days old, and then they were given their name, Jesus or Yeshua, God is salvation. And then, in verses 22 to 23, they no doubt paid the five shekels to redeem their son according to the law. And then, in verse 24, they offered two turtle doves or two pigeons for Mary's purification, which was a period of 40 days after Jesus would be born.

So what we see is that there in the temple, probably the Court of the Women. Mary and Joseph come in with Jesus. They do the right of circumcision; they name the baby, they give the redemptive shekels to buy Him back. "Every male child that opens the womb belonged to the Lord," taken from the Book of Exodus when they went out in the Passover and the firstborn in Egypt died and God said, "The firstborn is mine," so they had to redeem the child back with five shekels. And then the turtle doves would indicate that Joseph and Mary were poor. They couldn't offer a lamb; they couldn't afford it, and that Jesus came from a poor family, and He also came from a family that feared God and kept His word.

Now, the significance of the setting, before we get into the song, is that Jesus was born under the law. You say, "Well, what does that mean?" Let me read Galatians 4:4-5. Paul said, "When the fullness of time was come, God sent forth His son, made of a woman made under the law," why? "To redeem them that we're under the law that we might receive the adoption of sons." So the Bible is clear that when Jesus came into the world, He was made of a woman, talking about His humanity, and that He was born under the law, and the reason is that He might redeem us who are under the law. Now, He did that by paying the law's penalty when He died on the cross for our sins. So Jesus came as the promised Redeemer by fulfilling the law, living a perfect life, by paying the penalty of the law and dying on the cross so now He can redeem us who are under, so to speak, the curse of the law.

But as Mary and Joseph were coming into the temple, they encounter this man Simeon. Now my first point is I want you to notice in verse 25 to 27 we're introduced to the man who sings. We introduced to the man who sings. Now his name, verse 25, is Simeon. Simeon was a common Jewish name. One of the 12 tribes of Israel was the Tribe of Simeon so it was a common Jewish name, but the name means, "God has heard," and certainly God had heard Simeon's prayer and sent the promised deliverer or the Messiah. Now all that we know about Simeon is found here in the Gospel of Luke. A little footnote for you Bible students, the information in the first two chapters of Luke are found only in the first two chapters of Luke. So chapter 1 and 2 of Luke's gospel is found nowhere else in the Bible. So the information we have in these two chapters is kind of unique. No other gospels record what Luke does in chapters 1 and 2. So everything we know about Simeon is found here in Luke chapter 2.

Now, Luke does not tell us his age. It's believed that he was old. And if I were directing a movie, I'm going to give you some of my movie directing tips about this. If I were a movie director [inaudible 00:06:26] he would be very old. And a lot of Bible scholars believe he was about 112. That's getting up there. So he was very old, possibly. It doesn't really say. We're just guessing that he was ready to die, thus he was up in age. It doesn't tell us his occupation. We don't know if he was a priest. It doesn't tell us what he looked like. It doesn't tell us whether he was rich or poor, but God, the Holy Spirit, put four things in this text about the man, Simeon who sings that He wants us to know. Whenever God includes something in the scripture, it's an indication that He wants us to learn from it.

So I want you to notice four character traits about Simeon. These are the things that God considers important. Number one, in verse 25 it says that he was just. Another way to translate that is he was righteous or literally he was right with God. So Simeon was a man who believed God and trusted God, and he had the righteousness in God imputed to him by faith. To be righteous means to be right, so he was right with God. Are you right in your standing before God today? Then secondly, he was devout. Notice it in verse 25. The word devout could be translated cautious, and I like that. It means he was devout in a religious sense, so he was right with God and he lived out God's laws before men. But the idea of being cautious or devout means that he paid attention to God's word and he kept it and obeyed it.

The Bible says that we are to be what? Doers of the word not hearers only. You may come

every Sunday morning and hear the word taught, hear the word preached, but the question is, are you putting it into practice in your daily lives? DL Moody used to say, "Every Christian's Bible should be bound in shoe leather to remind them the word of God is to be lived out in their daily lives." I love that. So are you a doer of the word? So he was right before God and he was a doer of the word. He was devout or cautious. He lived for God or feared God. In Psalm 25:14, "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear God." So Simeon was a man who feared God.

Then notice thirdly about his character in verse 25, he was expectant. It says he was waiting for the consolation of Israel. Waiting for the consolation of Israel. Now, I have no doubt in my mind that this concept of the consolation of Israel is taken from Isaiah 40:1. What does it say? God speaking through the prophet Isaiah said, "Comfort ye, my people." And what it was was that when the Messiah would come to Israel, it would bring comfort to them and comfort to the world. We sing at Christmas, "Glad tidings of comfort and joy." So the idea is the fulfillment of prophecy, and Simeon's heart again was filled with the word of God. All the song that he sings is basically taken from the Old Testament. So he's saying, "I was looking for and I was anticipating the coming again or coming of Messiah."

And then fourthly, last but not least, notice verse 25. He had the Holy Spirit upon him. So this man was righteous, he was devout, he was expectant, and he was filled with the Holy Spirit. Notice the work of the Holy Spirit here in Simeon's life. In verse 26, it was revealed unto him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. So the Holy Spirit revealed to Simeon, "You are not going to die." So in verse 25, he had the Holy Spirit upon him. In verse 26, the Holy Spirit revealed to him, and what a cool thought. God actually told Simeon, "You're not going to die until you actually see the Messiah."

Think of the implications for that. "Simeon, be careful. You're going to fall off that ladder and kill yourself." "No, I won't. I haven't seen the Messiah yet." "Simeon, you keep eating bagels with chocolate and sprinkles on them, you're going to die." "No, I won't. I haven't seen the Messiah yet." "Simeon, you need to look both ways when you cross the street. You're going to be rolling over by an oxcart." "God, no, I won't. I haven't seen the Messiah yet." That'd be pretty cool. You're indestructible, you know?

So God revealed to this older man, "You will not die or depart until you see the Messiah." And then one more reference to the Holy Spirit. I already read the verse verse 27. "He came by the spirit unto the temple when His parents brought in the child Jesus to do for Him after the custom of the law." Now this was probably the outer Court of the Women, and he goes as he's led by the Holy Spirit. So he was righteous before God. We can be righteous before God by faith in Jesus Christ. He was cautious to obey the word of God. We should be obedient to keep God's word. And he was expecting, he was looking for the coming of Messiah, and we should be looking for the coming again, the second coming of Jesus Christ. And he was filled with the Holy Spirit. So everything true about Simeon can be true of us. We can be righteous, cautious, expectant, and spirit-filled.

I love what someone said about Simeon. "His eyes were expecting God's promise. His heart

was experiencing God's peace. His lips were expressing God's praise." I tell you, when I get old, I don't know that I'll live till 112, but when I get old and older... When I get old, I'm already old. When I grow older, I want to be able to have eyes expecting the Lord to come. I want to have a heart filled with this peace and I want to have lips that speak His praise. Amen? What a great, great testimony Simeon had, this man who sings for us this beautiful song.

So we're introduced to the man Simeon who sings. And now secondly, I want you to notice in verse 28-32, the song he actually sung. The song he sung is recorded in verse 28-32. First of all, I want you to notice it was a worship song. It was a worship song. Notice verse 28. "Then took he Him up." He is Simeon, and he took Him, Jesus, up in his arms and he blessed God. Verse 29. "And he said, 'Lord, now let thy servant depart in peace according to thy word.'" So in verse 28, he actually took the baby Jesus up in his arms. Now, this is where if I were directing a movie on the story of Simeon and the baby Jesus, I would have Mary and Joseph coming into the temple holding the little baby Jesus. And Simeon, this old man, sees them coming and he runs over them and just scoops the baby out of Mary's arms. Now you can imagine, moms, you're going to the temple and some old guy grabs your baby, right? It's like, "Ah, security."

And I can imagine that this old man Simeon with his rickety arms and I picture him holding the baby up like this. And maybe before he held the baby up, he looked at the baby and he leaned down and kissed the baby. He kissed the face of God. What an awesome thought. And he holds this child up. And what does Simeon do? He blesses God. He began to praise God. He began to worship God. As he holds this child up, whom he goes on to say, "My eyes have seen thy salvation." So he blessed God, verse 28, and he calls Him Lord or sovereign master, calls himself the servant. If He is the Lord or sovereign master, we are His servant. And he said, "Let me now depart in peace according to thy word." He used an interesting word about his death there in verse 29. He used the word depart.

You know what happens when you die? You depart. You move out. It's a word picture that pictures death for the believer as a prisoner in a cell, and the prison doors are opened and you are released. It's a word picture that's used of a ship that is tied by its moorings at a dock, it's loosed and it's set sail, and it goes out and disappears off the distant horizon. You know when you're standing on the shore and you watch a ship or a sailboat on the ocean, and when it disappears over the horizon, it's not lost, right? It's just separated from our view. We say goodbye here, they say hello there. Amen? That's what death is for a loved one who dies in Christ. The prison doors have been open, the ship has been loose from its moorings, it sets sail. And thirdly, it was used for a tent that had been taken up by its stakes and folded up.

In 2 Corinthians 5, the Bible likens our bodies unto tents. Some of our tents are leaning right now, and they're torn, and they're ripped, and they're brittle, and the tent stakes are coming up and they're flapping in the wind and they're ready to go. But the Bible says, "To be absent from the body," this tent, "Is to be," what? "Present with the Lord." And so Simeon says, "Lord, take down this old tent. I am ready for my building of God. A house not made with hands eternal in the heaven. Give me a new body." And the older you get, the more you groan for your body. Amen, old people? The 20 old people just clapped. Now they're going to have to go home and

sleep all week.

I tell you, I need a new body. We all need new bodies, and we're going to get new bodies. So we're going to going to depart and be with the Lord. My question is, are you ready like Simeon? Can you say, "Lord, I worship you. I bless you. And Lord, let your servant now depart in peace," and you long to hear those words, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant." Will you die with peace on your lips and praise in your heart? Will you worship the Lord? Now, notice also that his song was not only a worship song, it was a salvation song. Verse 30 and 31 he says, "From my eyes I have seen thy salvation, which," verse 31, "Thou hast prepared before the face of all people."

Simeon was looking with his old eyes at the baby Jesus. Now this has always thrilled my heart and I love this story. As Simeon looked at this child, he's holding this baby in his arms. As he look at this child, he said, "Lord, my eyes have seen your salvation." He didn't say, "I see the baby. I see the infant." "I see salvation." You know what that means? Salvation is a person. And you know who that person is? Jesus Christ. Amen?

Salvation is a person and it's all wrapped up. Someone said, "God wrapped His love in flesh and blood and sent it down to man." It's a gift from God the Father. The son of God incarnate. So He came, a child, to buy our salvation, to redeem us from sin. Salvation is not a ceremony. Salvation's not a creed. Salvation's not a conduct. Salvation is Christ the baby. Jesus was and is God's salvation. John 3:16 says, "For God so will love the world that He gave his," what? "Only begotten son." And by the way, the word begotten means unique, one of a kind. His only unique son. "That whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life." Salvation is not doing, it's believing. Salvation is not trying to keep codes or laws or rules or regulation. Salvation is trusting in the person of His son, Jesus Christ.

And like Simeon, we must put our faith and trust in Jesus. Jesus Christ is perfectly suited, and that's what I want to point out in verse 31. Notice he says, "God prepared for us a savior," in verse 31, "Which thou hast," and he uses the word prepared. God, you prepared this child. You prepared this savior. It means Jesus is perfectly fitted or suited to save us. Now, I want you to listen very carefully. How is Jesus suited or fitted or prepared by God the Father to save us? And here's my answer. Number one, He is God. Jesus can save us because He is God. Only God can save us from sin. Secondly, He is man. Jesus Christ came through the womb of the Virgin Mary and He took on full humanity. Now He's every bit God as though He were not a man, and He's every bit man as though He were not a God or God.

So fully God, fully man, and one person. No one ever before, ever after, is the God man but Jesus Christ. Now in His humanity, He was sinless. So He's unlike you and I only in the sense that He is without sin so He can save us. He could die on the cross in our place. And then thirdly, He's sinless, He lived a sinless life, and fourthly, He's a God of grace and love. He came in grace and love. And fifthly, He rose from the dead and He lives, and whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

So Simeon gives a worship song, blesses God. Simeon gives a salvation song. "I've seen your salvation. It's in the person of your son." And then thirdly, Simeon's song is a missionary song, and I love this. Notice in verse 31 and verse 32, at the end of verse 31, it says, "Which thou prepared before the face of all people," then in verse 32, "A light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of thy people, Israel." So notice three things. Number one, in verse 31, "Before the face of the people," verse 32, "A light to lighten the Gentiles." And then verse 32, "And the glory of thy people, Israel."

Luke makes it very clear in recording Simeon's song here that Jesus came to die and to save the whole world. All people. All people. "For God so loved the world." Red, yellow, Black and white. They're all precious in His sight. Jesus loves all the people of the world. Amen? So He gave this savior before the face of all people. And I'm glad I'm a gentile. Verse 32, "A light to lighten the Gentiles." He's not just for Israel, but He's also for the glory of thy people, Israel." Remember when we talked last Sunday about the Abrahamic covenant? The promise God made to Abraham? That through His seed, not seeds, but seed, singular, Christ, all the nations of the world would be what? Blessed.

So through the promised Messiah, the seed, Christ, all the world would be blessed. He came to make His blessings flow far as the curse is found. So Jesus came to die for the world and for the sins of the world. We have a gospel message that is for the whole world. Jesus came to die for all men's sins. Jesus said in John 14:6, "I am the way, I am the truth, and I am the life. No man comes to the Father except," how? "By me." Now you'd think He'd made it clear enough when He said, "I'm the way, I'm the truth, I'm the life," but then He goes on to add, "No one can come to the Father except through me."

Now, this is not popular in our culture today, but what is popular is not always correct. What is in vogue isn't always true. And what is true is that there's only one way for sinful man to get to heaven, and that one way has been provided for by God in the person of His son, Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "Think not that I've come to condemn the world." I haven't come to condemn the world, "But that the world might be saved." People are always accusing Christians, "You condemner. You just condemn me. And why are you condemning people?" We're not condemning anyone. You're already condemned. You're under condemnation. You're headed to hell. And God sent His son on a rescue mission. Christmas is a rescue mission. God sent His son to save us, to redeem us, to forgive us. And Jesus came for everyone, the whole world, and He is the only way. He is the only light. He is the only truth.

Now the song moves from Simeon the man to the song that he sung, the thirdly and lastly, Simeon stops praising and he started prophesying. This is in verse 33-35. "And Joseph and His mother," verse 33, "Marveled at those things which were spoken of Him." So when they heard what Simeon said about their son, it just amazed them. And Simeon then blessed them, verse 34. "And he said unto Mary, His mother, 'Behold, this child is set for the fall and the rising of many in Israel and for a sign which should be spoken against. And yes,'" as he looks at Mary, "'A sword shall pierce through thy own soul also that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.'"

So Simeon now stops praising and he starts to prophesy. Now it says there that Mary and Joseph marveled at the things that Simeon spoke. Why did they marvel? Because Simeon was giving them some information they hadn't heard before. Every parent likes to hear good things about their kids, right? You want to get in good with somebody? Just telling their kid's wonderful. They love you. But can you imagine when Simeon started singing over their son and he says, "He's a light to light the Gentiles and the glory of thy people, Israel. "My eyes are seen thou salvation." I'm thinking, "Wow." Simeon's probably thinking, "That's going to be awesome on a bumper sticker on my oxcart." "My son is the savior of the world. He's the redeemer."

Can you imagine that? So they were just marveled. The word means they were struck out of themselves. We say it just blew my mind or blew me away. They were just like, "Wow, I can't believe that." Now Simeon uses three images to explain the effect of Christ coming into the world. Number one, he uses the image of a stone. That's found in verse 34. Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, and if I were directing the movie again, I would have Simeon handing the baby back to Mary. And then he looks Mary in the face, and what he prophesied is primarily directed toward Mary, His mother. Verse 34. And he said, "Behold, this child is set for the fall and the rising of many in Israel." Stop right there. The fall and the rising.

Now that phrase is one of the most difficult in this whole episode to interpret or understand because it can be interpreted two ways. Number one, he's talking about two groups. He's talking about those who reject Jesus who will fall. And the second group arising are those who accept Christ and will rise. And that's a valid interpretation. That may be what he's saying. The Bible says that Jesus is a stone of stumbling to those who do not believe. To the Jews, He's a stumbling stone, but unto us which believe, He's the rock of salvation. So it's either the fall or the rising. But there's another way to view this, that he's talking about one person. Not an unbeliever and a believer, but one person that comes as an unbeliever and falls on that stone or is broken on that stone, and then God raises them up. Do you know the way to be raised up is for you to get down low? The Bible says, "God does not despise the broken heart. The contrite heart He will not despise, but the proud He knows are far off."

Jesus actually used this imagery of the stone. He said, "If you fall on the stone, you'll be both broken and blessed." But He says, "One day when He returns," when the stone comes, "If it falls on you, it will grind you to powder." So you either fall on the stone for salvation, or the stone falls on you in judgment and penalty. And I believe that you can see the two comings of Christ in this stone, that when He came the first time, especially as it pertains to Israel, that they rejected Him and they stumbled. They were scandal over the stumbling stone. But now when Christ returns the second time in His second coming, Israel, their eyes will be open and they will see their Messiah and they will be restored to their rightful place. I believe God has a future plan and purpose for the nation of Israel. So there's the fall, His first coming, and the rising, His second coming. But the application to us today is Jesus is either a stone of stumbling or the rock of salvation. It depends upon your response to His coming.

And then secondly, notice that He used the image of a sign. The end of verse 34, it says, "For a sign which shall be spoken against." Now you have to skip over the first part of verse 35. It's a

parenthesis, and you jump down to verse 35, the end of the verse after the parenthetical statement, "That the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." So it would read like this. "For a sign which will be spoken against," verse 35, "That the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." In other words, Jesus Christ is going to be a sign that divides people. You either believe Him or you reject Him. You either love Him and follow Him, or you do not love Him and follow Him.

You ever notice that you can talk sanely and intelligently with anybody about any topic of conversation, and everything's fine until you mention Jesus? Try it at Christmas. You know about your gifts and your weather and your jobs and what you're doing, and when you have all your unsaved family there, just say, "Well, let's talk about Jesus." "Jesus?" "Yeah, it is His birthday today. We're supposed to be celebrating Christ." "I don't want to talk about Jesus. Don't go there. Don't say that. Don't talk about it. I don't want to hear anything about Jesus." Like, freak out.

You talk about a sign that the thoughts of their hearts are manifested. You want to know where somebody's at with God? Just talk about Jesus around and see how they respond. Jesus is the dividing line of where you're at with God. He's a sign that shows where your heart is really at. And then thirdly, He mentions the sword. He mentions the sword. Notice that in verse 35, "Yes, a sword shall pierce through your own soul also." "A sword shall pierce through your own soul also that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

The Greek word for sword here means a large sword, and it's in the present tense. That means that it's constantly stabbing through Mary's heart. Now, he was talking to Mary, and I believe that this is the fulfillment of when Mary stood at the cross and watched her son be rejected and suffer and die on the cross that the sword pierced through her own soul. You talk about the highs of all highs. Angel shows up, "You're going to be the mother of the savior of the world." "Wow, that's awesome." And then you talk about the lowest of the lows. He'll be rejected, despised, and hated and crucified. You mothers that are here this morning, try to imagine standing and watching your child crucified. Jesus is 33 years old, but once you're a mother, you're always a mother, right?

You talk about a sword going through her heart. Mary at her station, weeping. She looked up and saw her son rejected, despised, spit upon, mocked, crucified, dying of painful, agonizing, shameful death, and the sword just went through Mary's soul. Jesus did that. He died to save us, but it was a painful experience for Mary that she had to watch her own son die upon the cross. Now, as you take this whole story of the baby Jesus and Simeon singing in the temple, let me wrap this up with three thoughts about the cross.

I believe that God has provided the perfect substitute for our sins in a person. His name is Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ came from heaven, took on humanity so that He could go to a cross and suffer and die for our sins. The cross is God's Christmas tree. The gift is eternal life. The package it's wrapped in is Jesus Christ. And I would say thirdly, we learned that we must take Him by faith. As Simeon went over to Mary and Joseph and he scooped the child up in his own

hands, so we must take Jesus unto ourself. We must look to Jesus and trust in Jesus. And he looked at Jesus and he said, "My eyes have seen thy salvation." Until you look to Jesus and faith, you cannot be saved. The Bible says, "Look unto Him and be saved, all the ends of the earth." He's the Savior.

Can you comprehend even a little bit the reality of God came down in the person of His son Christ, and He died for our sins on the cross, that we could have eternal life and go to heaven? That's amazing. No wonder why Christmas is such a wonderful time to celebrate the birth of the Savior. But have you trusted him? Have you taken Him as your own? Have you looked to Him by faith? Salvation is a gift of God. It's not of words lest anyone should boast. You can't save yourself. You can't be good enough to go to heaven. You don't go to heaven because of your race or your religion or your rights or your rituals. You go to heaven because you have trusted Jesus Christ. He alone can save you. Salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. There's no other way to be saved.

And thirdly, I would say that only then will you be ready to depart in peace or die in peace. Someone said you're not ready to live until you're ready to die. I know that Christmas is just a few days away, but I want to ask you this question. Are you ready to die? Are you ready to die? Can you say with Simeon, "Let me depart in peace, from my eyes have seen your salvation"? Until you see Jesus through the eyes of faith and you receive Him into your heart, you're not ready to die. And if you're not ready to die, you're not ready to live. And if you're here this morning and you say, "Pastor John, I don't know if I'm ready to die. I don't know if I've really trusted Christ. I don't know if I've been born again. I don't know if my sins have been forgiven. I don't know if I died right now that I would go to heaven," well then I want to give you that opportunity and I don't want anyone to leave here today without the opportunity to receive God's gift of eternal life.

Jesus said, "I've come that you might have life and that you might have it more abundantly." And if you haven't trusted Christ today, why not? The Bible says, "Now is the acceptance time." The Bible says, "Today is the day of salvation." The Bible says, "If you hear His voice, don't harden your hearts." And if God is speaking to you and God is calling you today, open your heart and receive Jesus Christ and know for sure your sins are forgiven, that you have eternal life. I want to give you that opportunity right now. Let's bow our heads in a word of prayer.