

Simeon's Song

Luke 2:25-35

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One of the things we like about Christmas is singing. I like to sing at Christmas, even though my voice is not as strong as it used to be. So I “make a joyful noise unto the Lord” (Psalm 100:1-KJV). That’s what I do; I make a “joyful noise unto the Lord.”

The Gospel of Luke is considered “the singing Gospel.” It’s full of the songs of Christmas. It has Mary’s song, Zachariah’s song, and now we have Simeon’s song. And the angels sang; they filled the heavens over the fields of Bethlehem singing, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!” (Luke 2:14).

One of the songs of Christmas is Simeon’s song, in Luke 2:25-35, which is called the *nunc dimittis*, in Latin. It is based on verse 29, “Now You are letting Your servant depart in peace.”

In the context of this song, Jesus the Savior has been born. Verse 11 says, “For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” And the shepherds were told to seek the child, and they found Him lying in a manger and worshipped the Lord.

Now the scene shifts from Bethlehem to Jerusalem in our text. Joseph and Mary present Jesus in the temple. It’s not talking about the inner sanctuary of the temple; it would be the outer courtyard. Herod’s temple had two areas in the outer courtyard; one was the court of the Gentiles and the other was the court of the women. So this song that we read about probably took place in one of those two courts, as Mary would be allowed to enter that area.

In verses 21 and 42, we see that Jesus has been circumcised and had been named after the angel instructed that He should be named Jesus, which means “Jehovah is salvation.” And we see that Mary and Joseph pay the five shekels to redeem Him, which is interesting, because Jesus is the Redeemer. But now they have to redeem the Redeemer. And in verse 24, they offered either “a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons” for Mary’s purification. So eight days after Jesus’ birth, He is circumcised and named. Forty days later, Mary’s purification takes place. They were doing all that the law of God had required, in Leviticus 12 and Exodus 13.

I point this out because the Bible says that Jesus was “born under the law,” Galatians 4:4-5. “When the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman...” that’s the Incarnation “...born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.”

And why did Jesus come “under the law”? To fulfill the law’s demand. He would do that as well by dying on the Cross and paying for our sins. “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us” (Galatians 3:13). When Jesus came, He perfectly fulfilled everything in the law. Jesus said, “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to destroy but to fulfill” (Matthew 5:17). He did that so His righteousness could be

imputed to you and me through faith.

When Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus went into the temple, they encountered a man named Simeon. Who is this man who sings, in verses 25-27? “And behold...” which means “look” or “see” “...there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ” or the Messiah. “So he came by the Spirit into the temple. And when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the law....”

This man was named Simeon, which means “God has heard.” No doubt he was praying for the Messiah to come, God heard his prayer and answered it. Simeon was one of the 12 tribes of Israel, so it was a very common name. All that we know about Simeon is found in Luke’s Gospel. Luke 1 and 2 have unique information that is found nowhere else.

Simeon is one of the ordinary people of Christmas. It’s interesting what Luke does not tell us about Simeon. He doesn’t tell us his age. The tradition is that he was 112 years old, but we don’t know for sure. If I was putting him in a movie, I would have him very, very old. That’s why he said, “You are letting your servant depart....For my eyes have seen Your salvation.” We don’t know his occupation. We don’t know if he was a priest or what he might have done. We don’t know what he looked like; there is no description of his physical appearance. And we don’t know if he was rich or poor.

But there are four things that God the Holy Spirit wanted us to know about Simeon. “The Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7). So look at the description God gives us of this man, verse 25. First, he was “just,” which means “righteous.” And I believe that happened, because he put his faith in Jesus Christ. How does a person become just or right with God? Through faith in Jesus Christ, like our father Abraham.

Second, Simeon was “devout,” which means “cautious to keep God’s law.” So he lived in the fear of the Lord. In Psalm 25:14, it says, “The secret of the Lord is with those who fear Him.”

So these are qualities that should also be true of us today. We need to be righteous by faith in Christ, and then God imputes the righteous of Christ to us by faith. And we need to be devout by studying God’s Word and being obedient to it.

Third, Simeon is described as being expectant. Verse 25 says that he was “waiting for the Consolation of Israel.” It was a title the Jews used for looking for the Messiah, looking for the Christ. Isaiah 40:1 says, “‘Comfort, yes, comfort My people!’ says your God.” So the Jews believed that when the Messiah would come, He would bring comfort.

It’s interesting that the very same word used for “comfort” in the Greek is also used in John’s Gospel for the Holy Spirit. It is the Greek word “parakletos.” It is one who comes alongside of us to comfort us, strengthen us and help us. So we have a unique relationship with the Holy

Spirit, as well as with the Word of God.

And fourth, Simeon had the Holy Spirit “upon him.” It wasn’t in him; it was “upon him.” Under the old covenant, the Holy Spirit did not come as an abiding possession to indwell all believers; He came upon certain individuals, kings, priests and people who were called for specific tasks. The Spirit would come upon them and lead them.

But under the new covenant, the Holy Spirit comes to indwell believers permanently. That’s why David prayed, in Psalm 51:11, “Do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.” That’s an old covenant prayer. The new-covenant believer doesn’t have to pray that prayer, because He said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5). Rather, we should pray that we don’t grieve Him, quench Him or resist Him. But He’s not going to leave you. Once you’ve been born again, He comes permanently to abide in the believer. Ephesians 1:13 says, “You were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.” So the Spirit of God dwells in us but was upon Simeon.

And notice in verse 26, that it was “revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ.” So this aspect of the Holy Spirit was that He was revealing to Simeon. And what did the Spirit reveal to Simeon? He would see the Messiah before Simeon’s death.

How cool that would be! “Simeon, be careful; you didn’t look both ways before you crossed the street! You could be run over by an ox cart!” “Simeon, get down off that ladder; you’re going to fall and break your neck!”

He would say, “No, it can’t happen. I haven’t yet seen the Lord’s Christ.”

You would be indestructible! I like that. So until he had seen Jesus, Simeon was indestructible.

And then in verse 27, “He came by the Spirit into the temple.” The Holy Spirit was leading and guiding him. So the Spirit was upon him, revealing things to him, leading and guiding him. That’s how the Spirit wants to lead and guide us.

The Bible tells us Simeon was right before God, he was cautious to obey God’s Word, he was expectant, looking for the coming of Messiah and he had the Holy Spirit. So should we. This is a beautiful picture of this man Simeon. Someone said, “His eyes were expecting God’s promise.” I like that. “His heart was experiencing God’s peace. And his lips were expressing God’s praise.” This is the man Simeon, who was singing.

Now I want to look at the song that Simeon sings. This is the heart of the text, verses 28-32. Simeon took the baby Jesus from His mother’s arms and lifted Him up, no doubt. “He took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said, ‘Lord...’ or ‘Kurios’ “...now You are letting Your servant...” or “bondslave, doulos” “...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.”

There are some facts about this song I want to point out. Number one, it was a worship song. He took Jesus in His arms and “blessed God.” And he called Him “Lord” or “sovereign master.”

Again, if I were orchestrating this as a dramatic movie, I would have Simeon going right over to Mary and grabbing the baby. But Mary would yell, “Ahh! Security, help! This old man just grabbed my baby!” Then he lifted the baby up and began to bless God, to worship God. That’s the spirit of Christmas.

Then Simeon called Jesus “Lord” or “sovereign master” and called himself a “servant.” Then he said, “...letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word.” The word “depart” is used in the New Testament for death, for departure. When you die, you do not cease to exist. Death is not the cessation of your existence. People think that when you die, you no longer exist. No so. You just move out of your body. That’s why it’s used in the Bible for death. It is used as a picture of a prisoner being put in prison, then the prison doors are opened and he is released from his prison. It is also used as a ship that is loosed from its moorings and sets sail on the sea.

Have you ever stood on the shore and watched a boat go out on the ocean and get smaller and smaller until it disappears over the horizon? We say “Goodbye” here, but someone says, “Hello” over there. They’re not gone; they’re just out of sight, separated from us. That’s what death is for the believer; it’s a departure.

It’s also used for a tent in 2 Corinthians 5:1-2. The Bible says that our bodies are tents. When you get old, you know your body is like a tent; it’s leaning and flapping in the wind, and the stakes have pulled up. It’s just barely hangin’ on. The Bible says that when “this tent is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” And he says that in this body, “we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven.”

How marvelous to think that I’m going to move out of this body, and I’m going to move into a new body prepared for heaven that God has given me.

So Simeon said that he was ready to die. Are you ready to die? Someone said, “You’re not ready to live until you’re ready to die.” Are you ready to depart and go to be with Christ, which is far better?

Number two, it also was a salvation song, verses 30-32. “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.” What beautiful words these are.

Simeon was looking at a baby, verse 30. Salvation is a Person. Salvation is not a ceremony, not a creed, not conduct, a race or a religion. Salvation is Christ. The baby Jesus was and is God’s salvation. Salvation is a Person—but not Confucius, Buddha, Muhammed or some other

ascended master. It is Jesus, and only Jesus. This is why Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). That's pretty exclusive.

So Jesus was in the arms of Simeon. He was looking at a baby. Salvation is the Person, Jesus Christ. John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." Salvation is a Person.

Like Simeon, we must put our faith and trust in Jesus, and in nothing else. Only He can save us.

Now notice in verse 31, Simeon made a statement that God "prepared" a Savior. God was preparing Him. He says, "which You have prepared before the face of all peoples." Jesus was prepared by God the Father and was sent by God the Father. The word "prepared" actually means "fitted" or "suitable."

In what sense is Jesus "fitted" or "suitable" to save us? Let me mention a few. He is truly God. When Simeon looked at that little baby he held in his arms, he was looking at God.

"Our God contracted to a span,

Incomprehensibly made man."

Think about that: the Incarnation, "the Word became flesh" (John 1:14).

Jesus was also truly man. And He was a sinless man. When we celebrate the babe in the manger at Christmas, we celebrate God in flesh. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us."

"Hail the incarnate Deity,

Pleased as Man with man to dwell,

Jesus, our Emmanuel." That is, "God with us."

So Jesus is truly God and truly man. This is why He is perfectly prepared or fitted to be our Savior.

Then what did He do? He died on the Cross for our sins. He willingly, voluntarily laid down His life upon the Cross, God's Christmas tree, to die for the sins of the world.

Jesus is also grace and truth. And He rose from the dead and lives to save us from our sin. No one else came from heaven, but Jesus did. No one else was God and man. No one else lived a perfect life. No one else died on the Cross for the sins of the world. No one else can save us. Acts 4:12 says, "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." No one else was buried and rose again from the dead to live forevermore. No one else but Jesus Christ did all these things.

Number three, this song was a missionary song. The Savior was “prepared before the face of all peoples.” “God so loved the world”—“all peoples.” Verse 32, “A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel.”

So Luke’s Gospel is universal; Jesus died not only for the Jews but also for the Gentiles. Again, John 3:16 says, “God so loved the world...” not just Israel, not just the Jewish people “...that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” Jesus came to die for the whole world. There is only one way to heaven, and Jesus is “the way, the truth, and the life.”

Number four, Simeon stopped praising and started prophesying, verses 33-35. “And Joseph and His mother marveled.” They listened to Simeon’s song, and they were blown away. The word “marveled” means “to be struck out of yourself.” As a hippie, we used to say, “That really blew me away! That blows my mind!” So they “marveled at those things which were spoken of Him. Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, ‘Behold, this Child...” he’s still holding the baby Jesus “...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)...” speaking to Mary “...that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.”

This is a song that is now a prophecy. And he is prophesying why Jesus came and what He would do. He uses three figures of speech: that of the stumbling stone or skandalon, the sign pointing to what’s in our hearts and the sword.

First we’ll look at the stone, in verse 34. “Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, ‘Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel.” This is an image taken from the Bible where it talks about Jesus being a stone of stumbling. It talks about Him being “the chief cornerstone” that would be rejected (Ephesians 2:20).

This phrase is very difficult to understand which of the two views is the correct view. The first view is that “the fall and rising” speaks of two individuals: those who fall or stumble over Jesus will be lost and unsaved, and those who believe in Him will be raised to salvation.

The second view, on which I lean, is referring to those who are broken, fall on Him and then are lifted up or rising. The Bible says, “Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time” (1 Peter 5:6). That’s a Biblical principle. So those who are proud will be taken down, and those who are humble will be lifted up. There are those who stumble over Jesus and don’t have salvation. Then there are those who believe and are saved.

Second is the image of a sign, verses 34-35. But notice that the beginning of verse 35 is in parenthesis. Taking out the parenthesis it reads, “This Child is destined...for a sign which will be spoken against...that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.” This means that Jesus Christ reveals what’s in your heart.

Do you humble yourself, repent and believe in Jesus? Or do you harden yourself and lift yourself up against Him? That is the picture.

Third is the image of the sword. That is seen at the beginning of verse 35 in parenthesis. "(Yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also.)" Simeon is speaking directly to Mary here. He is primarily referring to when Mary would be standing at the foot of the Cross.

If you are a mother, try to imagine standing at the foot of a cross watching your son be crucified. You talk about a sword piercing you! The word "sword" here refers to a large sword, like the one Goliath used. And the grammar in the Greek here refers to a sword that keeps on piercing you. When she stood at the foot of the Cross and watched her Son die for the sins of the world, the sword was piercing Mary's heart. Mary was at the Cross weeping. So it was a sorrow that she bore all through her life.

To put this in perspective by way of wrap-up, we need to be more like Simeon. There are four ways we need to be like Simeon. First, we need to be led by the Spirit of God. Second, we need to be taught by the Word of God. Third, we need to be obedient to the will of God. And fourth, we need to be blessed and privileged to see the salvation of God. So be like Simeon.

As Mary stood at the Cross, we need to realize that God provided the substitute for sin. Christmas is God providing a substitute for our sin. God gave us Jesus, who was perfectly suited, through the Incarnation, the Crucifixion, the Resurrection, the Ascension and exaltation, to be the Savior of the world. And we must take Him by faith. Salvation is a free gift. Trust in Him today. Then, and only then, will you be ready to depart in peace.

"You're not ready to live until you're ready to die." We have no lease on life. Tomorrow is not guaranteed. That's why the Bible says, "Now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2). And the Bible says, "Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts" (Hebrews 3:15).

Are you ready to die? Have you believed in Jesus Christ? Can you say with Simeon, "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace....For my eyes have seen Your salvation." Put your faith and trust in Jesus today.