

**“The Original Carols”****Sermon 3 – “Peace: The Song of the Saint”****Introduction**

If I had to choose a favorite character in Scripture, it would probably have to be Simeon here in Luke chapter 2. Apart from this chapter, apart from this one little episode at the beginning of Christ's life, we know absolutely nothing about this man. He's never mentioned again, even in any of the other gospels. And yet this one episode is enough to form a rather complete picture of this man's character, isn't it? Enough to secure for Simeon a place of honor among the saints of old.

Over the past couple of weeks, we've been looking at the songs that surround the birth of Jesus in Luke's gospel. We looked at Mary's *Magnificat* and at Zechariah's *Benedictus*. This week, we're skipping over the song of the angels, the *Gloria in Excelsis Deo*, which we'll consider, Lord willing, in two weeks and which was sung on the very night of Christ's birth. But today we're considering Simeon's *Nunc Dimittis*, from the opening words in Latin, “Now let depart” or “Now dismiss.” Along with each of these songs, we've been focusing on different words traditionally associated with Christmas and that still appear this time of year in the world all around us but usually without any real reference to Christ. “Joy” is one; “Hope” is another. A third one is the word “peace.” Peace. Another Christmas buzzword used in advertisements and decorations. As I mentioned a couple of weeks ago, in my bank there is a huge sign behind the tellers that simply says, “Share Joy and Peace.” What they intended to mean by that message and what that message has to do with banking I have no earthly idea.

But peace: what does the world around us generally mean by the word “peace”? Well, it can certainly have political and military connotations, can't it? Peace often means the absence of conflict and war. Or, more subjectively, peace is often used to describe feelings of calmness and serenity and relaxation, the absence of stress and worry. And many of us even often associate such feelings with the holidays, don't we? We get time off of work. For a little while we don't have any pressing responsibilities. We get to spend time with the people we're the most comfortable around, and so we're relaxed and “peaceful?” Is that what peace really is? Or is it something more? Of course it's something more, far more, and Simeon's song helps us see that. This brief song and its context teach us at least three things about true peace: where it comes from, what it comes through, and what it comes by (to end a bunch of phrases with prepositions). But first, . . .

**I. True peace comes only from God.**

This is clear from the opening line of Simeon's song: “Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace.” Simeon knew that the only reason he was able to depart this life in peace was that God was enabling him to do so. His peace came from God. And his peace was something particularly associated with the work of God's Holy Spirit: notice the emphasis on the Spirit's work within Simeon's

life. Simeon is described for us in v. 27 (read). Verse 28 (read). Verse 29 (read). True peace comes from God: it is a gift from God, especially by the work of the Holy Spirit.

How different this is from the world's view of peace! According to the world, where does peace come from? Well, often it's viewed as something that we have to work up ourselves. It's seen as a state of mind that one can achieve using the proper techniques, whether those techniques are meditation or time management or whatever else is touted as an aid to relaxation and stress-relief. But whatever method is used, peace is still seen as something that we must achieve for ourselves, something that comes from within us. And even we as Christians can fall into the same way of thinking, can't we? We lack peace, and so we immediately begin to ask, "All right, what can I do to get more peace? How can I make my life more peaceful?" When instead, our very first impulse ought to be to turn to God because He is the only true source of true peace. We ought to be praying for the work of the Holy Spirit within us to give us the peace that only He can give. At least five times in the NT, God is called "the God of peace," and several times more the peace that we ought to enjoy is called "the peace of God," that is, the peace that comes from God. And what is the third quality listed in Gal. 5 as a "fruit of the Spirit"? "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace . . ." Where does true peace come from? It comes only from God. But secondly, . . .

## **II. True peace comes only through Christ.**

In vv. 30-32, Simeon gives the reason why he is able to depart this life in peace (read). In other words, his peace came through Christ. As Simeon, this aged saint who had been waiting his whole life for the Messiah, who had been promised by God that he would not die until he had seen that Messiah with his own eyes – as Simeon took the Christ child up in his arms, he was finally able to say "my eyes have seen your salvation." He calls Jesus "God's salvation," for that baby was indeed the embodiment, the incarnation of salvation. Simeon goes on to state that this salvation is something that God has "prepared in the presence of all peoples." Simeon apparently had understood more of the OT prophets than the scribes and Pharisees, the Scriptural experts of his day, had understood. He knew that God's salvation in Christ was not something that was going to be limited to ethnic Israelites but had implications for "all peoples." He goes on to develop this idea in v. 32: Christ was going to be "a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." The Messiah certainly was the true glory of Israel: of all the wonderful privileges granted to her by God, this was by far the greatest, that the Messiah would be one of them. But He wasn't just for them: he would be a light for all nations. This imagery of the Messiah as "a light for the Gentiles" is one that appears frequently especially in Isaiah, but my favorite verse in this respect is Isaiah 49:6: there God says to His Servant, to the coming Messiah, "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth." In other words, Christ was too bright and too glorious a light to be limited to just one nation: God's salvation needed to shine beyond the borders of Israel to the very ends of the earth.

Also, earlier in this passage, in v. 25, Christ had been described in another interesting way, as "the consolation of Israel." This is an idea very closely related to peace, isn't it? Consolation, comfort. This too is a reference back to Isaiah. It has often been noted that the book of Isaiah is divided into two

broad parts: in the first 39 chapters, the focus is primarily (though not exclusively) on judgment, on the condemnation of Israel for her sins, but beginning in chapter 40 to the end, the focus is much more on the promise of a coming salvation. And this second half of Isaiah, chapters 40-66, is often called “the book of comfort,” because this word “comfort” or “consolation” is used multiple times in those chapters. In fact, chapter 40 begins with those famous words, “Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned.” This is the language of peace, is it not? And Luke here teaches us that all of these prophecies of comfort and consolation and peace in Isaiah came to fulfillment in the birth of Christ who was himself “the consolation of Israel.” But what else would we expect from this child, this son who was given, and who in Isaiah 9:7 is called “the Prince of Peace”?

True peace comes only from God, but it also comes only through Christ. Only Christ, in the salvation He has provided, has made true peace possible. People today seek peace through all sorts of different means, don't they? They think they can find peace through family or friends, through a girlfriend or boyfriend or a spouse, through money or possessions (perhaps that's the subtle message of that sign at my bank), through health or through success in their jobs or through politics or through any one of thousands of different ways. But nothing will ever bring true peace apart from Christ and the salvation that only He can provide us. Simeon knew that, and so he knew peace. True peace comes only from God, true peace comes only through Christ, and finally . . .

### **III. True peace comes only by faith.**

Though God alone can give peace and though He gives peace only through Christ, yet He has also appointed an instrument by which we access that peace: the instrument of faith. The peace that comes from God and through Christ will forever remain outside of us until we receive it, until we grasp it by faith. Simeon here is a perfect example of OT faith. In fact, one of the reasons why Simeon is so fascinating to me is that I think of him kind of like the OT incarnate, as the faith of the OT saints in human form and coming to its fruition. One of the words that always strikes me in this passage is the word “waiting.” In v. 25, Simeon is described as “waiting for the consolation of Israel”; and in v. 38 we're told that there were others along with Simeon and Anna who were “waiting for the redemption of Israel.” That is what OT faith did: it waited. God had given all of these glorious promises and prophecies, the OT saints believed them, but then all they could do was wait for them to be fulfilled. Most of them died without having their faith become sight; but in the person of Simeon, OT faith finally saw what it had been waiting for. I cannot even imagine what Simeon must have felt as he took the infant Jesus into his arms. There, in his own arms, lay the hopes and expectations and longings of all of God's people for thousands of years, all of the ancient promises of God, all of the predictions of the holy prophets in one tiny child. Though to human eyes, he was just an ordinary human baby, Simeon saw Him through the eyes of faith, and because of his faith, he had peace.

But this peace does not automatically belong to everyone precisely because it depends on faith, for not all have faith. This becomes clear in what Simeon says to Joseph and Mary in vv. 33-35 (read). Christ divides all of humanity into two distinct groups depending on whether they believe in Him or not. Those who believe are those who will rise and like Simeon have peace. But those who do not believe will

fall, will stumble over Christ to their own eternal destruction and will never have true peace. True peace comes only through faith, faith in God and His promises, faith in the fulfillment of those promises in Christ.

But here in this faith-based nature of true peace lies its difference from the false “peace” of the world. The world’s peace depends entirely on outward circumstances, on whether everything around us is going smoothly enough to allow us to feel relaxed and calm. But true peace belongs to those who believe despite everything that might be happening around them or even to them. Look at Simeon: he was about to die. He was about to face that great enemy of death, and yet he was able to do so with perfect, complete peace. As J.C. Ryle wrote, “We see in the song of Simeon how completely a believer can be delivered from the fear of death; ‘Lord,’ says old Simeon, ‘now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace.’ He speaks like one for whom the grave has lost its terrors, and the world its charms . . . . What is it that can enable a mortal man to use such language as this? What can deliver us from that ‘fear of death’ to which so many are in bondage? What can take the sting of death away? – There is but one answer to such questions. Nothing but strong faith can do it. Faith laying firm hold on an unseen Saviour, – faith resting on the promises of an unseen God, – faith, and faith only, can enable a man to look death in the face, and say, ‘I depart in peace.’” And if faith can give peace even in the face of death, it can give peace in the midst of any and every other trial that we face in life. Yes, this life is often filled with difficult and even tragic experiences. This world is not a peaceful place. But for those of us who have faith, even when all around us is sheer chaos, we can have inward peace, that settled assurance that God is still on His throne, that our salvation is secure in Christ, and that even every trial is for our ultimate good and His ultimate glory. True peace comes only from God, comes only through Christ, and comes only by faith.

### **Conclusion/Application**

So do you have peace this morning? Even if you are in the midst of grievous trials, do you have peace? If not, then the first question to ask yourself is, “Do you have faith?” Do you believe in God and His promises, do you believe in Christ and in His salvation? For until you find salvation by faith in Christ you will never have any hope of true peace. But even when we are trusting in Christ for salvation, there are still times when our faith can be weak, especially in times of trial; and as our faith weakens, so does our peace. So if you are still lacking peace this morning, don’t look to yourself, don’t try to figure out what you can do to increase your peace; for true peace comes only from God by the working of His Holy Spirit. Pray to Him; beg God to deepen your peace, to strengthen your faith, to hasten the workings of His Spirit in your heart. And by faith in Christ, by faith in the “Consolation of Israel,” we can have a peace that endures even in the midst of the most grievous of trials, even in the face of death itself. May the God of peace grant us all such peace.