

## **Simeon's Song: My Eyes Have Seen Your Salvation**

Luke 2:25-35

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*Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. <sup>26</sup> 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. <sup>27</sup> And he came in 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, <sup>28</sup> he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,*

*<sup>29</sup> "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace,  
according to your word;*

*<sup>30</sup> for my eyes have seen your salvation*

*<sup>31</sup> that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,*

*<sup>32</sup> a light for revelation to the Gentiles,  
and for glory to your people Israel."*

*<sup>33</sup> And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. <sup>34</sup> And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed <sup>35</sup> (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."*

– Luke 2:25-35, ESV

### **Introduction: How Long?**

I really do not like waiting. I'm afraid Canadian businessman Craig Bruce was probably right when he said, "You usually have to wait for that which is worth waiting for." But that doesn't mean I have to like it. It is Christmas Day, and I think waiting for Christmas Day as a child is part of what conditioned me to hate waiting. Beth and I met during her freshman year in college and our first date was on her 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. We had to wait until after she graduated four long years later to get married. That didn't exactly soften my attitude toward waiting.

Today we come to the final of the Original Christmas Songs. Next week, on New Year's Day, we'll learn about the new birth, as we return to the Gospel of John and begin chapter 3. But today we finish this Advent and Christmas with the final song from the lips of an old man, a man who had spent a large part of his life waiting, and finally had his patience rewarded.

### **A. Simeon's Character, v. 25**

*Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. – v. 25*

The first thing we're told about Simeon is a short description of his character: He was righteous and devout. Righteous means two things: Justified before God by grace through faith on the basis of the imputed righteousness of Christ and having a righteous character and lifestyle, living rightly, according to God's moral law. Simeon was righteous in both senses of this word. He was clearly waiting eagerly for the Lord's Christ, and so he shows evidence of saving faith. But his faith, being a true and saving faith, also bore fruit in his life in real, practical righteousness.

Now I said that righteous means two things, but really it only means one: having the righteousness of Christ by grace through faith. Sometimes we contrast salvation by grace with obedience living by works, but the truth is that the only righteousness anyone has that counts in the eyes of God is the righteousness of Jesus Himself, and the only way for us to receive that righteousness is by grace through faith, from first to last. Simeon was a living display of the transforming power of God's grace.

Simeon was also devout, a word in Greek which literally means "taking hold well." He took hold of the grace of God and God's promises well, and so his life was marked by a steadfast devotion to the Lord. Simeon was a devout man who encountered Jesus, Mary and Joseph in the Temple, but he was apparently not a priest. If he had been, Luke would almost certainly have told us so, especially since he was in the Temple. No, Simeon was apparently a righteous, devout layperson. Maybe he was a farmer or a craftsman or a merchant, but the center of his life was grounded in taking hold of the Lord.

After this two-word summary of Simeon's character, we're told that Simeon as "waiting for the consolation of Israel." He knew that Israel needed comfort from God, and he knew that the Messiah would bring this comfort, this relief. As a devout man, he probably knew Isaiah 40 well, which opens "'Comfort, comfort my people,' says your God." Simeon was waiting for God to finally send the comfort which He had promised 700 years earlier.

Finally, Simeon the righteous and devout man waiting for the consolation of Israel is described as having the Holy Spirit upon him. Three times in three verses, verses 25-27, Luke reports the Holy Spirit's influence on Simeon – "the Holy Spirit was upon him . . . it was revealed to him by the Holy Spirit . . . And he came in the Spirit."

Just as surely as the only source of righteousness in the life of the Christian is the righteousness of Christ, so also the only source of power for knowing God and living the Christian life comes through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit is the One who both imputes and infuses the righteousness of Christ to believers. The Holy Spirit is the One who gives us saving faith as a gift. The Holy Spirit is the One who reveals God's Word to us. The Holy Spirit is the One who cultivates and produces the fruit of the Spirit in us. We cannot be righteous apart from the righteousness of Christ, and we cannot be spiritually fruitful, knowledgeable or faithful apart from the power of the Holy Spirit.

## B. Simeon's Reward, vv. 26-28

*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.* <sup>27</sup> *And he came in 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,* <sup>28</sup> *he took him up in his arms and blessed God* – vv. 26-28

After we're given a description of Simeon's character and relationship with the Lord, we're told about a special and specific promise he had received by direct, private revelation from God: Simeon had been told "by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ." That was quite a promise, and I'm not sure how Simeon thought it would be fulfilled, but we know he was looking for the fulfillment in the Temple.

Simeon "came in the Spirit into the Temple," so the Holy Spirit led him to seek the Christ there. But the Spirit usually works through the word of God, and Simeon likely knew the promise of Malachi 3:1: "*And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple.*"

Obedience to the word of God also brought Joseph and Mary into the Temple. God asked His people to consecrate the firstborn to the Lord and to offer a sacrifice, a sin offering, after the 40-day period of uncleanness for the mother of a firstborn. So, Joseph and Mary came after 40 days, in obedience to God's word. They were too poor to buy a lamb, and so they offered the sacrifice designated for poorer families, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons."

I'm not sure how Mary felt when this old man in the Temple took her newborn baby in his arms and praised God for the child, but the words he was about to sing would leave her and Joseph both speechless.

## C. Simeon's Song, vv. 29-32

<sup>29</sup> *"Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace,  
according to your word;*

<sup>30</sup> *for my eyes have seen your salvation*

<sup>31</sup> *that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,*

<sup>32</sup> *a light for revelation to the Gentiles,  
and for glory to your people Israel."*

This is another famous nativity song in Luke's Gospel which has been known for its Latin opening words. Mary's song is called the *Magnificat*. Zechariah's song is called the *Benedictus*. The angels' song, which we heard last night, is called the *Gloria*. Simeon's song is known as the *nunc dimittis*, which are the opening words of the Latin translation and which mean "Now you are dismissing . . ."

The opening line of Simeon's song in the ESV is not the greatest translation. A more literal rendering would be, "Now, Lord, you are releasing Your slave in peace, according to Your word." In other words, it is time for Simeon to die, for him to be released to his service to his Master in this life and to enter into the joy and rest of his Master for eternity.

J.C. Ryle's observations on Simeon's song are powerful:

*We see in the song of Simeon how completely a believer can be delivered from the fear of death. "Lord," says old Simeon, "now let you your servant depart in peace." He speaks like one for whom the grave has lost its terrors, and the world its charms. He desires to be released from the miseries of this pilgrim-state of existence, and to be allowed to go home.*

Simeon knows it is finally time for him to be dismissed because he has seen God's salvation.

Notice two things:

1. Simeon acknowledges that he is seeing God's salvation, not the plans or schemes of any man. Salvation belongs to the Lord, and the Lord alone is now bringing it about.
2. Simeon also confesses that Jesus Himself is the salvation of the Lord. Simeon is not going to live long enough to see Jesus pay for the sins of His people on the cross or to rise from the dead. He will not see any of the work of Christ, but because he has seen the person of Christ, he knows he has seen the Lord's salvation.

The second half of Simeon's Spirit-inspired song may have surprised Mary and Joseph, for Simeon sings of how God's salvation is being prepared in the presence of "all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles" If they were surprised by such a strong inclusion of Gentiles in God's salvation, they shouldn't have been. Isaiah especially told repeatedly how God's Messiah would take the glory of God to the nations and would bring all peoples to know the Lord:

*I am the LORD; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations – Isaiah 42:6*

*"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." – Isaiah 49:6*

But hundreds and hundreds of years before Isaiah, God's original covenant promise to Abraham had been that all nations of the earth would be blessed through the promised offspring of Abraham.

But the salvation God sends does not leave Israel out of the plan of redemption. Jesus is God's salvation who has been sent to be a light for revelation to the Gentiles, but also *"for glory to your people Israel."* God's Gospel is first for the Jew and also for the Gentile. The light of salvation comes for all who will believe.

#### **D. Simeon's Insight, vv. 33-35**

*And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him.<sup>34</sup> And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed<sup>35</sup> (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."*

After he sings his song of thankful praise to God, Simeon sees the looks of wonder on the face of these young parents and blesses them in the name of the Lord. Then he speaks directly to Mary. Joseph will not live to see the earthly ministry of Jesus, but Mary will. She will stand at the foot of the cross. She will see her beloved son rejected and despised. It's hard to say how much of this prophetic insight Mary understood, but the words must have stuck with her. Most Bible scholars believe that Mary herself was Luke's primary source for the opening chapters of his Gospel, so Mary was apparently able to recall Simeon's words many years later.

The people of God were under a corrupt, self-serving leadership that desperately needed humbling, while many poor people were excluded and overly burdened with regulations and requirements. They needed to be raised up. Isaiah had spoken in chapter 40 not only of comfort for God's people, which Simeon longed to see, but also of how the lofty places would be made low and the low places raised higher. These same themes were echoed in Mary's song, in which she sang:

*"he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;  
he has brought down the mighty from their thrones  
and exalted those of humble estate"*

As the light of the world, Jesus would expose the hearts of those around Him, showing them for who they really were. Prostitutes and lepers would come to Him with love and gratitude and would receive salvation, while religious leaders and powerful men would harden their hearts and reject Him. He would be opposed, as Isaiah had prophesied in 53:3, *"He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief"* Yet Jesus would not be the only one acquainted with grief; a sword would pierce Mary's soul, too. She would stand weeping at the foot of the cross as her Son paid for her sins and for all of the sins of all of God's people throughout all of time.

These words to Mary may seem out of place for Christmas Day. Can't we just stick with good news of great joy for all the people? Why do some people have to rise while others fall? Why must Jesus be opposed and why must a sword pierce Mary's own soul? Well, in the reality of a

fallen world, and in God's perfect justice and mercy, sin is costly and must be paid for and wicked hearts are dark and must be exposed. Thus salvation comes through suffering and glory waits only at the other end of a cross.

## Conclusion

- So, we've come to the end of these original Christmas songs. What have we learned? We have learned that Christmas is the perfect time to worship the Lord for who He is and for what He has done.
- In Mary's song, we heard praises to God for His mercy and His strength, for His sovereign power and faithful goodness.
- In Zechariah's son, we heard God praised for coming to the rescue of His people, delivering us from the hands of our enemies and from those who hate us, raising up a mighty warrior-King Messiah who wins the victory for God's people, bringing us out of darkness and into the way of peace.
- Then, last night in the angels' song, we heard glory to God in the highest combined with peace of earth for the people of His good pleasure.
- Finally, today, we heard the humble, thankful song of an old man who saw himself as a slave of God, filled with joy at the sight of God's salvation in the flesh, the light of the world as a baby boy just 40 days old, and yet destined for suffering and glory.

In each of these songs, praise comes from eyes of faith that see what God is doing, what the world is missing. The world almost always misses what God is doing, but those with eyes of faith are able to see and praise the Lord. The world wasn't paying any attention to an old priest and his wife who had been unable to have children for so many years or to a young poor couple from a backwater town and a child born under questionable circumstances. The world didn't care about the dirty shepherds in the fields or about the old man in the Temple, telling people how God had promised him that he would see the Messiah.

None of these people mattered. Their faces would never grace the cover of the magazines in the grocery store check-out line. Their lives and deaths were never noticed by the historians of their day, who were too busy tracing all the political machinations of King Herod's dysfunctional family.

Yet this is how God was working, and this is where God was speaking, and these are the people whom God was saving. They knew it, and they praised His holy name from hearts of joy!

Are we looking with eyes of faith to see what God is doing in our world? Are our priorities aligned with His, so that we value what He values and pay attention to the kinds of people and events that matter to Him? Besides having eyes of faith and hearts filled with the Holy Spirit, these men and women who sang these songs of faith also had minds saturated in the Scripture.

The psalms and the prophets were so woven throughout their thinking that they knew how to think God's thoughts after Him and how to praise Him sing His own words.

So this Christmas and into the coming New Year, if we're going to sing the praises of God like these original Christmas songs, we need to pray for eyes of faith, hearts filled by the Holy Spirit and minds saturated in the word of God. May the Lord be pleased to draw our eyes, hearts and minds away from the world's distracting and unimportant attractions, from our flesh's self-seeking desires and from the ensnaring lies of the father of lies, the god of this age who blinds the minds of unbelievers. May the Lord give us more and more of His word, His Spirit and His perspective on all of life, and then may our lives be overflowing with the praise of His glorious grace.