

Simeon Sees the Lord's Christ

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Bible Text: Luke 2

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Luke chapter two and we are commencing our reading at verse 21.

And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called JESUS, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb. And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord; (As it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord;) 24 And to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.

And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him. And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law, Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel. And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him. And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.

And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity; And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem. And when they had performed all things

according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth. And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him.¹

Luke chapter two and I want to take as my text the passage from verse 28 to 32. He, that is Simeon:

...took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.²

It seems to me that there are at least three main attitudes in the way that people today generally celebrate Christmas. There is, first of all, what might be called the secular packaging. This is the attitude that focuses upon outward festivities such as the giving and receiving of presents, the putting up of all the decorations inside and out in preparation of matters of food and the heavy consumption of alcohol. And this seems to be the most common attitude at the present attitude in our society and in our nation. Christmas today is really looked upon as nothing more than a time for partying, a time for selfish enjoyment and over indulgence.

But then there is a second attitude that we find today. And this may be described as a wistful attitude. And it seems to me that this attitude is becoming increasingly evident as people begin to realize in a materialistic society that things do not satisfy, that God has set eternity in our hearts and that we are restless until we find our rest in him. People today listen to the message of the carols. They listen to the Christmas story with a wistful, often aching longing that somehow this might cease being merely just an ancient story and might really happen to them—a wistful attitude.

And then, thirdly, and most importantly, there is, of course, the Christian attitude which celebrates with great joy not only the birth of Christ, but also our rebirth in him. And this, of course, is the great significance of Christmas to all who are really Christian. Christ was born, in the words of the carol, to raise the sons of earth, born to give them second birth.

So, you see, Christmas is not just a date in the religious calendar. Christmas has actually happened to us. Our very hearts are become the dwelling place of God's Son and he has been born in us. Or, as Paul puts it, "Christ in you, the hope of glory."³

That's Christmas. That's the real message, the real heart of the experience.

¹ Luke 2:21-40

² Luke 2:28-32

³ Colossians 1:27

And so we have three different attitudes to Christmas. And this is my prayer and longing this morning that both the secular and the wistful may be transformed in your heart and in your life into the Christian.

Now I want devote two Sunday mornings to invite you to view Christmas with me this year through the eyes of two of the most elusive characters to be found in the Christmas story. Their names are, of course, Simeon and Anna. I say elusive because we know so very little about them. We are hardly given any information whatsoever. In fact, Luke is the only gospel writer to even mention them.

These two suddenly appear in the temple, in Jerusalem at the exact same time that the baby Jesus is brought in to be named. And then suddenly their names disappear from the records of holy Scripture.

But although we are told very little about them, what we are told here in this text is of great significance and great instructiveness. You see, these two characters clearly form a pair. They go together, don't they, hand in hand. Just look at the way that Luke shows us so many similarities between them.

You will notice, first of all, that they were both old, in advancing years. They were both living in the city of Jerusalem at the time of our Savior's coming. They were both devoutly religious people. They were both looking forward to the first Christmas; longing and anticipating the Christ, the Messiah to be born. We are told that Simeon was waiting for the consolation of Israel.

It is a glorious description, a beautiful description of the Messiah himself, the Lord Jesus Christ, God's anointed King, the one who would come to comfort and to bring consolation to his people, the Comforter, the Counselor, that comes in the birth of Jesus Christ.

And in a similar way we are told that Anna was looking for redemption in Jerusalem. She was looking for the coming of a Deliverer, one who would ransom and redeem his people from all their sins, one who would set them free from their captors by the payment of a price, one who would bring salvation to his people.

And, last but not least, they were both prophets. Anna was a prophetess. And although we are not specifically told that Simeon was a prophet, it was no doubt—from what we are told by Luke here in this passage—that he possessed the rare gift of prophecy. He was a vehicle of divine, supernatural revelation from God to man, from heaven to earth. We read how he was filled with the Holy Spirit and he was led of the Holy Spirit and how he spoke under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit when he held the Christ child in his arms.

Is it any wonder, friends, that Luke places them together side by side?

Now, this morning I want us to focus our thoughts on the godly Simeon and then, God willing, Sunday a week now we shall be looking at the godly Anna.

Now, I don't know whether Luke was musical or not. We know he was a doctor. Whether he was a singing doctor or not we don't know, but he was a man who was interested in singing because here in the opening chapters of his gospel he records no less than three of the earliest Christmas hymns.

We have, first of all, that lovely song of Mary called *The Magnificat*.

My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.
For He who is mighty has done great things for me, And holy is His
name.⁴

What a testimony.

And then, secondly, we have that glorious song of Zacharias the priest known as *The Benedictus* because of the first word, "blessed." He says, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people."⁵

And now, finally, we have this lovely song of Simeon known as the *Nunc Dimittis*

Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, According to
Your word; For my eyes have seen Your salvation.⁶

Three glorious hymns of praise and thanksgiving for the Savior's birth.

Now as we look at this tremendous song of Simeon this morning I want you to notice that it consists of both prayer and prophecy and that as Simeon saw the baby Jesus in the temple and he took him up into his arms, he began to pray.

And you will notice, in the first, place it was a prayer of humble submission. Notice the way in which he describes himself in this prayer. He says, "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace."⁷ He describes himself as none other than God's servant.

But what is even more amazing and remarkable is that the actual word that he uses in the Greek is the word δουλος (doo'-los) which means, literally, "slave." He says, "Lord, now You are letting your [slave] depart in peace."⁸

Now slavery, of course, was a very common institution in the first century. There were many servants. There were many slaves. And there was a world of difference between the two.

⁴ Luke 1:46-47, 49

⁵ Luke 1:68

⁶ Luke 2:29-30

⁷ Luke 2:29

⁸ Ibid.

One writer sums it up like this. He says, “A servant was one who hired out his services. He was self employed and was paid for his labor. The Servant also had certain rights. He could change his employer if he wanted to. He could work when and where he liked, but not so the slave. He was the property of his owner. He didn’t have any rights at all and he could be used and disposed with exactly in what any way his master saw fit.”

And so, you see, when the godly Simeon describes himself as Jehovah’s slave he was using the most lowly, the most self effacing and humble title that he could possibly find. He joyfully acknowledges God’s absolutely sovereignty and right to rule his life. And he yields himself in humble submission to do God’s will. He is nothing more or less than Yahweh’s slave.

And, of course, this is not the only person in the Christmas story to describe himself in such a way. Think, also, of the virgin Mary. Do you remember when the angel Gabriel appeared to her and announced the glad tidings of Christmas, the Messiah’s birth, that she would be the mother of the Lord? How does Mary react? How does she respond? Again, she does so with humble, lowly submission. She says, “Behold, the maidservant of the Lord.”⁹ And, again, the words servant she uses there is the word δουλος (doo’-los).

She says, “I am nothing more or less than the Lord’s slave. Let it be to me according to your Word.”¹⁰

But, friends, I want to tell you this morning that this title, servant, is none other than the blessed title that God gave his beloved Son when he came into this world to accomplish our salvation. The Lord Jesus Christ came to this earth as a servant of the Lord.

In that 42nd chapter in the book of the prophet Isaiah God says concerning his Son, “Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights!”¹¹ God was pleased. God was delighted in the servant of the Lord.

But let’s not forget those wonderful words of Saint Paul as he writes that second chapter of his letter to the Philippians which is virtually Paul’s version of the Christmas story. He says, “Let this mind,”¹² let this attitude, this mindset:

...who being in very [nature] God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant... And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.¹³

We are called upon to imitate the incarnation, to imitate the incarnate Lord.

⁹ Luke 1:38

¹⁰ See Luke 1:38

¹¹ Isaiah 42:1

¹² Philippians 2:5

¹³ Philippians 2:6-8

Oh, let me ask you in the service this morning is that true of you? Is that true of me? Do you know anything of this Christ like humility and lowliness and self abdication? And have you come to that realization that you are not your own, that all that you have and all that you possess this morning is the property and the possession of the Lord? And have you, therefore, yielded your complete life to him? Have you surrendered and relinquished every part of your being and your life to your Lord and master? Is he Lord of all this morning? Can you truly say with the godly Simeon, “Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace”?¹⁴ It was a prayer of humble submission.

Then, secondly, notice it was a prayer of joyous resignation. It was a prayer of complete and joyful resignation. Listen to what he says. “Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace.”¹⁵

You see, we are told by Saint Luke that it had been revealed to Simeon by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death. He would not die before he had seen Christmas, before he had seen the Lord’s Christ.¹⁶ And now having viewed him in the temple courts with his own physical eyes, he was ready and willing to die. He sees himself here as nothing more than God’s slave who was being dismissed from his duties. He is one who has faithfully served his Lord and master all the days of his life. He has fulfilled all his mater’s wishes and now he is being dismissed in peace.

Bishop Ryle puts it so beautifully. “He speaks like one to whom the grave has lost its terror and the world its charm. He desires to be released from the misery of his pilgrim state of existence and to be allowed to go home. He is willing to be absent from the body and present with the Lord. He speaks as one who knows where he is going when he departs this life and cares not how soon he goes. The change with him will be a change for the better and he desires that his change may come.”

Such, my friends, is the Christian view, an attitude towards death and it is absolutely glorious. It is victorious. It is joyous. It is triumphant. You see, the reason why this godly man Simeon was ready to die, the reason why he was able to depart this life in peace was because his eyes had seen God’s salvation.

Oh, my friends, let me ask you in this service this morning, is that true of you? Is that your experience, your testimony here today? Have you beheld in that babe of Bethlehem, the Christ, the Messiah, the Savior, the deliverer of the world? And have you come to put your complete trust in him alone?

You see, Simeon not only saw him with his eyes, but he also took him up and embraced him with his arms. There was a personal appropriation. He was literally receiving Jesus

¹⁴ Luke 2:29

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ See Luke 2:26

Christ as his own personal Savior and Lord. And, thus, he was ready to die and to depart in peace.

Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, According to Your word; For my eyes have seen Your salvation.¹⁷

It was a prayer of humble submission. It was a prayer of joyful resignation. And then thirdly and lastly I want you to notice that it was a prayer of prophetic hope and expectancy. It was a prayer of prophetic hope. Notice how he goes on his prayer from verse 30.

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.¹⁸

And Luke tells us that, “Joseph and His mother marveled at those things which were spoken of Him.”¹⁹

Now what exactly was it in this tremendous prophetic prayer of Simeon that caused Joseph and Mary to marvel? And it is two things.

Firstly that this baby, this child had come as a light to bring revelation to us Gentiles. You see, not only was he to be the glory of Israel and to bring them salvation, but wonder of wonders he was to bring salvation to us lost and pagan Gentiles; salvation, no longer exclusive, to the Jewish nation. The gospel, said Simeon, was prepared before the saints of all people. It was for every people of every tribe and tongue an nation on earth, for the Jew and for the Gentile. No longer was there to be a distinction between nations. No longer was salvation to be exclusive for the Jews. No longer was there to be that dividing wall of partition which had been there for hundreds and hundreds of years.

No, it was soon to be abolished and to be broken down. And all who were to come in repentance and in faith, whether Jew or Gentile, was to become one, one body, one new man in Jesus Christ.

My friends, this is the glory of Christmas. This is the glad tidings of great joy for all people. The Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.

You see, the Bible reminds us this morning that as Gentiles in the flesh, non Jews, we were afar off. We were with out God. We were without any hope in this world. We were strangers. Satan had blinded our minds. We were born in state of spiritual darkness and blindness. Our eyes were closed. We just could not see. We were in ignorance of the blindness of rank unbelief. This was true of every one of us. And the glorious good news of Christmas is that Christ came as a light.

¹⁷ Luke 2:29-30

¹⁸ Luke 2:30-32

¹⁹ Luke 2:33

Jesus said, “I am the light of the world. [And] he who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.”²⁰

He has come as the light of the world. He has come to shine upon us in our darkness and to dispel the darkness and to bring us into that light of everlasting life.

He has come to fulfill that great prophecy of Isaiah. “The people who walked in darkness Have seen a great light; Those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, Upon them a light has shined.”²¹

And the wonderful good news this morning is that that babe of Bethlehem, born on that first Christmas morning has also visited our hearts because the God, said Paul, “Who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”²² A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles.

But then, secondly, Simeon tells us the wonderful news that he also came to be the glory of Israel. “A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.”²³

Now, no one who fully knows his Bible aright will fail to understand why this specific description suits Israel because it is with Israel that we associate that shekinah glory, that cloud of heavenly light which was a manifestation of the presence of God in the midst of his people. Yes, Israel was, indeed, a glorious nation because God had chosen them, set them apart as his own possession, his own inheritance. God said, “You only have I known, have I loved of all the nations of the earth.”²⁴ God lavished his love and attention upon them. He entered into a covenant, saving relationship with them. He chose them above all the other nations and blessed them above all on the face of this earth. And he gave them privilege upon privilege.

Yes, Israel was, indeed, God’s crown of glory.

Do you remember how in Romans nine Paul gives us that wonderful list of Israel’s privileges. He piles them up one on top of the other just like Christmas presents under the tree. He says, “To whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises.”²⁵

And then Paul suddenly pauses as he comes to the climax. “Of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God.”²⁶

²⁰ John 8:12

²¹ Isaiah 9:2

²² 2 Corinthians 4:6

²³ Luke 2:32

²⁴ See Amos 3:2

²⁵ Romans 9:4

²⁶ Romans 9:5

You see, friends, the covenant, the law, the promises—tremendous privileges and blessings, though they were—yet they were absolutely nothing compared to this astonishing fact that out of Israel was to come the Savior of the world. You see, this was to be their honest honor, their highest dignity that the mother of our Lord was a Jewish woman and that the blood of one born of the seed of David according to the flesh was to make atonement, to bring salvation for the sins of all his people.

Yes, Christ is, indeed, the glory of Israel, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of your people Israel.

Now, it is important to remember this morning that these prophetic words of Simeon, although they were accomplished in part at the time of our Savior's first coming 2000 years ago, yet they shall receive a much fuller accomplishment at the time of Christ's second advent.

Notice here how Simeon speaks of the Gentiles and the Israelites. Notice the order in which he puts them. He puts the Gentiles first. "A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, And the glory of Your people Israel."²⁷ It is the Gentiles first, the Israelites second.

Now you may be thinking, "But why? Why is that? Especially in view of the fact that the New Testament reminds us that the gospel was for the Jew first and then for the Gentile."

Well, the Holy Spirit had a very definite purpose in reversing the order because the nation of Israel at the present moment in time had been cast off temporarily through unbelief through disobedience. They had rejected the Messiah in their blindness and ignorance. They had crucified the very Lord of glory. They cried out saying, "We will not have this man Jesus to reign over us."²⁸ There is a veil over their hearts. They are in the darkness of unbelief.

But, says Paul, "When the fulness of the Gentiles have been gathered in, then all Israel shall be saved."²⁹

You see, it is the fulness of us Gentiles first. When we have been gathered in, then we shall see the conversion of Israel. The veil shall be taken away from their hearts and minds. They shall look upon him whom they have pierced and they shall acknowledge him to be the Savior and the glory of Israel.

"A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, And the glory of Your people Israel."³⁰

²⁷ Luke 2:32

²⁸ See Luke 19:14

²⁹ See Romans 11:26

³⁰ Luke 2:32

You see, Simeon's Christmas prophecy not only points us back to the First Advent, but it also points us forward to the Second Advent, to the coming again of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ and the consolation of redemption's plan.

And, friends, like Simeon we, too, need to be standing on tiptoes this Christmas, anticipating that glorious event of the coming again of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the one who is going to burst through the clouds of heaven with power and with great glory to take his waiting people home.

You see, we are living in the last hours of the last days. Now is our salvation nearer than when we first believed.³¹ The coming of the Lord is surely drawing near.

Now, of course, we don't know this morning exactly when he will come. The Bible doesn't give us dates, but it does give us data. The Bible declares that where we see these things beginning to come to pass, said Jesus, "Life up your heads, look up for your redemption is drawing near."³²

Christian friends, this morning if we truly are to experience a happy Christmas, if we are to truly enter into the joy and the wonder of this celebration, then we, too, need to adopt the same attitude of godly Simeon. We need that humble submission. We need that joyful resignation. "My eyes have seen Your salvation."³³ And we, too, need to stand on tiptoes with that blessed, prophetic hope and expectancy, anticipating the coming again of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.

May God grant to us for his name's sake. Amen.

³¹ See Romans 13:11

³² See Luke 21:28

³³ Luke 2:30