

Simeon's Song - Nunc Dimittis - Luke 2:25-35

Scripture Reading: Luke 2:22-26

Introduction

This morning, we come to our final sermon in our Christmas series regarding the Uncommon Christmas Carols found in the Gospel of Luke as we come to the Song of Simeon found in Luke 2:29-32

When we looked at the angels' song last week, Jesus had just been born and Mary and Joseph were still in Bethlehem but as our account opens today we read in verse 22 [**Luke 2:22**] that the time had come for purification according to the Law

That means that the encounter with Simeon took place when Jesus was 40 days old

And the account paints a rather poignant portrait as we envision this godly, elderly man taking the infant Jesus into his arms and pronouncing a blessing to God because of him

It's unfortunate that most modern English translations of the Bible leave out a word that is included in the Greek version of verse 25 because omitting it causes this account to lose some of its force

That word is typically translated as "behold" and the text in our ESV Bible should read "Now *behold* there was a man..."

In the Greek, that word is included as a means of emphasis that calls one's attention to what is being revealed

It's a "Hey! Look at this!" kind of word that is meant to convey a pleasant surprise

Luke doesn't indicate that Simeon was a particularly powerful or important man or that he was invested with an office like being a priest or anything

So Simeon was most likely just an ordinary layman and the only surprise seems to be the main thing that Luke emphasizes: the character of Simeon - Simeon was a unique and notable man because of his attitudes and actions

When Jesus was born, religion in Israel had suffered serious decline as the faith of Abraham and Moses had been watered down by the burdensome doctrines of the Pharisees and Sadducees

And yet there remained a religious remnant of people like Joseph and Mary, Zechariah and Elizabeth, Simeon and Anna, and Joseph of Arimathea [**Mark 15:43**] who were still expectantly looking for the arrival of their Messiah

Luke records that Simeon was a "*righteous and devout*" follower of God and he had waited for a very long time in anticipation of the rescue of Israel

Simeon was an elderly man whose name means "God hears" and he had a personal interest in the Messiah beyond even the others because he had been promised by the Holy Spirit that he would live to see "the Lord's Christ"

While we aren't told this, it's possible that Simeon had been praying for the arrival of the Messiah and God had promised him that he would not die before he saw the Messiah's arrival – that would certainly make sense

We will be looking at Simeon's complete message as we find it in Luke 2:25-35 but his song itself is somewhat shorter and is found in verses 29-32 which says [**Luke 2:29-32**]:

"Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel."

In the Latin Vulgate Bible the first words of Simeon's song are "*Nunc dimittis*" which means "now you dismiss"

Because Simeon, having received the blessing of seeing and holding the baby Jesus, was now ready to have his life come to an end if that was God's will

Clearly, Simeon was able to face his own death unafraid and he has a great deal to teach us about living

That is to say, he shows us how we should live in the light of Jesus and that is going to be our focus this morning as we look at this passage

First, we will see that Simeon lived with **focused attention**

Then we will see that he lived with **expectant assurance**

And, lastly, we will see how Simeon lived with **abiding peace**

I. Live with focused attention

Renowned author, the late Stephen Covey, states in his book “The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People” that the second habit of a highly effective person is to **live with the end in mind**

In a nutshell, that means one must have a clear destination or outcome in mind and then live according to the values and principles that will guide you to that goal

To illustrate this habit, Mr. Covey invited the reader to imagine their own funeral and to envision the people who were in attendance and what they were saying about them now that they were gone

His point was you should expect to be remembered as you lived - not as you wish you had lived

Clearly, for the Christ-follower the goal should be to become like Christ and we find the values and guiding principles that, when practiced and empowered by the Holy Spirit, will lead us toward that goal in God’s written Word, the Bible

Because, if we want to be seen today and remembered later on as a model of Christ, we must actually strive to live as a model of Christ

We should live so that those who know us but don’t know Christ might know something of Christ by knowing us

And for Simeon to be called a “righteous and devout” man tells us a great deal about how he lived his life according to the Word of God

“Intentionality” has become something of a buzzword these days and for it to be said that one is living their life intentionally is a supreme compliment - and in these verses we see that Simeon lived with intention

For him to be called righteous, his behavior had to be according to God’s standards and to be called devout he had to have been a sober-minded and reverent individual and neither of those characteristics happens by chance

Simeon was a man of faith and devotion who focused his attention on God and on God’s promises to him and to Israel and lived accordingly

First we see that Simeon understood well his relationship to God

Notice in verse 29 [**Luke 2:29**] as he begins his song, Simeon refers to God as “Lord” and the Greek word behind that title is not the typical *kurios* that is normally used and it means “one who holds complete power or authority over another”

This particular word is only used five times in reference to God and it’s a very strong word that denotes complete submission to absolute authority – something like the power wielded by a despot

I believe that it’s here that we see the key to Simeon’s righteous and devout life - the way he viewed God and God’s supremacy in his life didn’t allow him to see that he had any option to live differently

Then, in verse 27 [**Luke 2:27**], we see that Simeon was sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit

The fact that Simeon was present in the temple on the day and moment when Joseph and Mary walked in with Jesus wasn’t a happy accident or according to Simeon’s own planning - he was led there at that time by the Spirit

Just as we see Jesus led by the Spirit into the wilderness after his baptism [**Matthew 4:1**] and Philip being directed by the Spirit to go up to the Ethiopian’s chariot [**Acts 8:29**] and Peter being directed by the Holy Spirit when the men came from Cornelius to fetch him in Acts 10 and 11, we now see the Holy Spirit direct Simeon to be in the temple

The Holy Spirit regularly guides us but that guidance is most often through a gentle nudge or influence that we must be attuned to lest we miss it or misattribute it

But notice that verse 27 is the third time that the Holy Spirit is mentioned in conjunction with Simeon

In verse 25 we see that the *“Holy Spirit was upon him”* and in verse 26 we see that his seeing Jesus had *“been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit”* and now he was directed or guided by the Holy Spirit

Clearly Simeon was purposely attuned to the leading and directing of the Holy Spirit in his life

Simply put, Simeon’s mode of life was to have his attention focused on the things of the Lord

And that led him to live with expectant assurance

II. Live with expectant assurance

Think of how easy it would have been for Simeon to have been like Zechariah

You will remember from when we looked at Zechariah’s song two weeks ago that Zechariah had prayed intently for a child believing that God could fulfill his request

But had at some point he determined that God wasn’t going to bless him and his wife Elizabeth and he learned to be content with God’s sovereign decision

He wasn’t bitter over it - he was just resigned to the idea that God didn’t mean for him to be a father

After all, both he and his wife were well beyond the normal ages for child-bearing at the time of the angel Gabriel’s appearance so having a child didn’t seem likely

Likewise, Simeon could well have decided that all of Israel had waited for thousands of years already and maybe Messiah really wasn’t going to come during his lifetime after all - maybe he had misunderstood the Holy Spirit

After all, he was an old man and folks tend to get more cynical as they age

I think that may well be because when a person has seen the downward trend of the world over a longer period of time they begin to despair about how bad things might get

Besides, when you’ve reached the point where you know your yesterdays outnumber your tomorrows it’s easier to engage in retrospection than in prospection

So it’s worthy of notice when an older person remains positive and filled with expectation and confidence for the future Simeon was like that

His confidence wasn’t some version of self-manufactured positivity either - it was based on the promises of God

And Luke’s verb usage in the word *“waiting”* reveals that this was the ongoing attitude that Simeon had as he lived each day in the persistent expectation that this could be the day when he would meet the Messiah

From our passage we come to understand that Simeon was knowledgeable about what the Word of God said

And while Simeon doesn’t directly quote any Old Testament passages, he does allude to some

When we read in verse 25 [**Luke 2:25**] that he was *“waiting for the consolation of Israel”* we see a hint of Isaiah’s prophecy from **Isaiah 40:1-2** where Isaiah spoke of the time when God would provide comfort to his people through the Messiah –

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, that she has received from the Lord’s hand double for all her sins.

Then we see that Simeon understood something of the Messiah’s mission that others didn’t figure out for some time

Look with me at verse 32 [**Luke 2:32**] where we see Simeon state that God had prepared *“a light for revelation to the Gentiles”* revealing his knowledge of God’s promise to Abraham to bless all nations through his offspring

And he understood that would mean glory for Israel

He also knew that the Messiah's arrival would cause an upheaval as he revealed to Mary in verse 34 [Luke 2:34] - that the Messiah would bring blessing to some and judgment to others

And from all of this we see that God had given Simeon more than just the ability to recognize the Messiah when he came - he also gave him knowledge of the Messiah's mission

Simeon knew what the Word of God said and he knew that the Holy Spirit had promised him personally that he would live to see the Messiah come

And he surely knew the accounts of how God had been faithful throughout Israel's long history

So he lived each day looking for that day - it was simply his way of life to be patiently, expectantly, and confidently watching and waiting for God to do exactly as he said he would

We also have no indication exactly what form Simeon expected the Messiah to take and if he was like most of Israel he was likely expecting some sort of conquering hero to come striding into his life

So we can imagine him daily searching every face he saw as he eagerly anticipated his Messiah

Still, Simeon knew the God he served and he had a "Messiah mindset" that caused him to live with expectant assurance anticipating the day when the Messiah would appear

And as we will see next, meeting the Messiah enabled him to live with abiding peace

III. Live with abiding peace

In verse 29 [Luke 2:29] Simeon having taken the infant Christ into his arms exclaims to God

Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word

Remember, the Greek word behind the title "Lord" is not the usual word but denotes an absolute ruler

So here we have Simeon portrayed as a sentinel who has been watching faithfully for the dawn being released from duty as soon as the first ray of light appeared

Having fulfilled his duty, Simeon is ready to be relieved and depart

Simeon possesses the inner sense of well-being and harmony that reconciliation with God brings about and he is comfortable in contemplating his death

And as he is holding the author and means of salvation in his arms he declares that he will be departing this world in peace [Luke 2:30]

Everyone else in the temple that bothered to look at the little family that walked in saw a carpenter along with his wife and baby

Contrary to the way the Renaissance artists painted them they didn't have little halos hovering over their heads

But with eyes of faith granted by the Holy Spirit, Simeon saw God's Salvation, the Consolation of Israel, the Light of the world that was born to bring the hope of reconciliation to all people

Death for Simeon, and for all who know Jesus as Savior and Lord, isn't a thing to be feared

It's a blessed release from the mortal body of sin and the limitations of this earth into the liberation of an eternity free from sin in the presence of God

We aren't told of Simeon's death or how long he lived after this day

We are only told that, with his eyes having seen the Lord's salvation that he had longed for, he was ready to immediately depart from this earth without concern or care or regret

But seeing Jesus does more than permit a person to depart in peace; it also allows one to have an abiding peace during their earthly life

Simeon describes the arrival of Jesus as *“a light of revelation to the Gentiles”*

And in **Colossians 1:13** we read how belief in Christ delivers one from the domain of darkness and into the kingdom of the Son - notice that the transfer is automatic and not something that one must wait for death to deliver

Jesus himself said in **John 8:12** –

“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

Eternal life begins at the moment a person accepts Christ and, as we read in **Philippians 4:7**

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard [the Christ-followers’] hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Simeon believed God when he said he would send his salvation so Simeon was able to watch for the Messiah eagerly but without anxiety because he trusted completely that what the Lord said would happen

Conclusion

Simeon is one of those characters we find in the Bible that appears suddenly and leaves just as quickly but who nonetheless teaches very valuable truths to those who slow down and look for them

And in Simeon we see a great example of living with one’s eyes firmly fixed on Christ because his focused attention was on the things of the Lord and the salvation he was promised he would witness

And focused attention is the key to living with expectant assurance and abiding peace as Simeon did

The secret to drawing a line from point A to point B or mowing your yard in straight lines or even riding your motorcycle through a curve is in not focusing your eyes on where you are but on where you want to wind up

And that’s true of our spiritual walk as well

While we need to have an accurate understanding of where we are, our *focus* must be on where we want to be

And we find that in God’s Word

Simeon is described as a man of the Spirit but he was also clearly a man of the Word and those two things go hand in hand because it’s primarily through God’s Word that the Holy Spirit speaks and it’s in the Word that we see the example set by Jesus

So, if you want to be sensitive to hear and respond rightly to the Spirit’s leading and directing and want to become like Jesus, you need to be a person who is in and under the Word

To assist you in that endeavor, we have several different Bible reading plans available to help you systematically read through God’s Word

I cannot recommend strongly enough that you make being in God’s Word a part of your daily routine because, in doing so, the Holy Spirit will be able to show you more completely what God is doing in the world

According to Luke’s account of the birth of Christ, only one person truly seemed to readily grasp all that God had set in motion when his Son was born

We see this in his brief message to Mary in verses 34-35 [**Luke 2:34-35**]

“Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.”

And in his descriptions of Jesus that harken back to several specific Old Testament prophecies

I believe Simeon saw so clearly because he was focused his attention on the things of God by being in God’s Word

As we stand on the cusp of the New Year, let me encourage you to be a person of the Word whose focused attention is on the things of God

Simeon also exhibited the attitude of expected assurance because he was constantly looking for the promised Messiah

That leads us to ask whether our day to day choices and attitudes reflect the reality that Jesus is coming again

Do we have the attitude of Simeon and start each day with the thought that our activities of the day might well be interrupted by the return of our Savior to take us to be with him?

I think for many, if not most, Christ-followers the return of Jesus is a matter of intellectual knowledge - we know it *will* happen and that it *could* be today but we don't really expect it to happen any time soon

And I believe our less than effective daily living for the Lord might well be the product of our less than expectant daily looking for the Lord's return

Strive to make your attitude like that of Simeon who like the psalmist could say [**Psalm 130:5-6**]

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope; my soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning.

Because, for those who have accepted Christ, being focused on God and eagerly looking for and expecting our Lord's return is the recipe for a life of abiding peace now and at their death

As a follower of Jesus Christ accept that God has removed you from the domain of darkness and placed you in the kingdom of his Son - the kingdom of light

Then let go of the past and all of its failures because they cannot be undone and stop trying to live a life that is totally Christ-like all at once because that will only result in failure and disappointment

What you must do is live each moment for Christ – make each decision and perform each action as you believe Jesus would as they present themselves

Then, when you fail in that effort, note it, confess it, accept God's promised forgiveness for it, and let it go

Then do the next thing as you believe Christ would as it presents itself and give God the glory when you succeed

Determining to do each next thing to the best of your Spirit empowered ability with the knowledge that God has already and irrevocably accepted you isn't just a more manageable way to live, it will result in a life that is filled with abiding peace

Let's pray

Luke 2:22-26 (page 857)

And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord") and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons." 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. 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. 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, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said...