

The Skeptical Student

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristchurchEastBay.org. Good morning, Christchurch.

My name is Jocelyn Fidiga, and I'm a part of the team that prepares the element on the second Sunday. A reading from the Gospel according to Luke.

Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him.

It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple's courts.

[1 : 09] When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace, for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of your people Israel.

The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother, This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed, and a sword will pierce your own soul too.

This is the gospel of the Lord. Praise to you, O Christ. Good morning. You might notice there's a stranger up here. I'm Andrew Ong's long-lost brother.

My name is Jesse. We're spiritual brothers. I'm a pastor here in the Bay Area in Castro Valley at a church called, this is her church of yours called Indelible Grace.

And Andrew and I got to go to seminary together on the East Coast, where there is real winter. And it is, it's the first Sunday of the new year.

[2 : 47] I just want to ask a couple questions. How are you entering into the new year? How are you entering into it? Any resolutions?

Hopes? Dreams? Anxieties? Or maybe to put it differently, what are you waiting for this year? What do you see in the next year? Our scripture passage today is actually about waiting and seeing. It's really appropriate for a Sunday like this, where we're on the brink of Christmas and the new year.

And right in the middle of our passage, Simeon sings out. He says, For my eyes have seen your salvation. For my eyes have seen your salvation.

He is seeing something. Now for many of us, Christianity doesn't naturally register as a way of seeing. Maybe you don't, you're not a Christian, you're here with family or you're seeking.

[3 : 54] Maybe you know that Christianity is something about belief, right? Faith. Isn't faith not seeing? So how and why does Simeon say, My eyes have seen your salvation?

Let's pause that question. But don't you want to see salvation in your life? Like, don't you want some sort of redemption?

Maybe it's some ailment that you're suffering from. Maybe it's a relationship that's estranged. Maybe you feel the emptiness of life.

You want something more. You want to see salvation. Isn't that beautiful? Not just to believe in salvation, but to see it.

To see it. That's our question today. How do we see like Simeon? How do we see like Simeon? And here's the big idea.

[4 : 54] Salvation is not just something we believe in. Salvation is seen. Salvation is not just something we believe in. Salvation is seen.

Would you pray with me as we ask God to open our eyes so we might see him? Let's pray. Oh, Father in heaven, thank you. We thank you that we are here safely on a rainy, winery day. Thank you that we are in your presence, oh Lord. And I want to boldly ask, Spirit of God, the same Spirit who led Simeon to see Jesus, would you lead us into the throne room of Jesus? Would we see salvation, oh God? We ask this in Christ's name. Amen. So first we need to do some work. Right? Isn't faith about believing what we can't see? Right? Salvation is by faith. Right? Not sight. But just to back up in Luke's gospel, Luke's gospel actually opens on sight.

[6 : 01] The opening verses of chapter one, like a good scholar, Luke reports his sources for this gospel. And he says, hey, I interviewed eyewitnesses, people who saw.

Eyewitness, those who saw with their own eyes. And then Luke's gospel unfolds with miraculous appearances or sights. Right? An angel appears to Zechariah in the temple.

Then Mary sees an angel. Joseph sees an angel in Matthew. And then the angels appear to the shepherds and give them a visual sign.

They say, hey, look for a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths. And the shepherds say, hey, let's go to Bethlehem and do what? See this thing.

Do you hear the sight? It's about visual. Christmas is all about seeing. Christianity is about sight. And Simeon's story is chock full of visuals as well.

[7 : 03] Did you see it? Our reading? His hymn has eyes, light, sight, presence, glory. And again in the middle, for my eyes have seen your salvation.

And this only makes sense because what the Christian claim is, is that the invisible God has become visible in the Lord Jesus Christ. The immortal, the transcendent God who made all things, has become a person with flesh.

The Word made flesh. That's the miracle of Christmas. So how do we see salvation? I'm going to ask two questions for the rest of this sermon.

How do we see? That's the first half. How do we see salvation? And secondly, how do we know that we've seen salvation? Okay? How do we see salvation?

And how do we know that we've seen salvation? So the first thing we see in Simeon are two keys to his sight. The first key, you must see the desolation.

[8 : 11] You must see the desolation. Luke introduces Simeon like this. He says, This man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel.

And that phrase, the consolation of Israel, is the first key. Consolation. What does that mean? It means this deep comfort after loss.

Right? There is no consolation unless there has first been desolation. Desolation. Desolation. Some of you in a couple weeks will be looking for consolation whenever the 49ers are beat.

And are out of the playoffs. You'll need some sort of consolation. Right? Well, at least we still have Steph Curry on the Golden State Warriors. For now. For now. Consolation comes after.

We see consolation in desolation, don't we? And Israel knew desolation. They knew desolation. Centuries of conquest.

[9 : 17] The Babylonians. The Persians. The Greeks. The Romans. Time after time. Taking over the country. Exile. Occupation. Humiliation. And we don't even know the story of Simeon.

We get so little about Simeon. Precious little. All we know is that he's righteous and waiting and devout. We don't know the ways that desolation has hit him.

Why is he waiting for the consolation of Israel? Do you see the desolation? Only if you see the desolation will you begin to see salvation.

Jesus says it this way. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Who sees salvation? It's those who see the desolation.

And it's not just out there in the world. There's plenty of desolation you can see out there. It's also in here. Right? In us. In every one of us.

[10 : 20] Simeon says in verse 35 that this child will reveal, quote, the thoughts of many hearts. Jesus exposes us.

He exposes our personal desolations. I moved to the Bay Area about two and a half years ago. And I'm a historian by training. And so I like to look up a bunch of old pictures of San Francisco right after the big earthquake.

earthquake. In the early 1900s. And it's incredible. Just, it wasn't the earthquake. It was the fires. The earthquake caused.

They just burned. This thriving. The biggest city on the West Coast at that time. It was like the New York City of the West Coast. It just demolished it. Devastated it.

It's the desolation. And you see these ruins. These ruins. People just standing, looking at the crumbling walls. And friends, some of us, like that's our hearts.

[11 : 25] That we're like a city that's been ravaged. First by an earthquake. And then the fire. There's some part of our being and our life that we'd rather not admit that it is desolate.

We don't want to think about that. Do you see the desolation? Do you see the desolation? Because only those that see the desolation will want something different.

We'll want something. We'll want salvation. If you're comfortable here this morning, that's great. That's great. But Jesus is offering us something different.

Something for the uncomfortable. I have a friend who says, who calls life in the Bay Area. He says it fosters a cruise ship mentality.

A cruise ship mentality. The weather's good. Well, most of the time. Weather's good, right? The jobs are good. The food is good. The amenities are endless.

[12 : 30] I had to buy a new pair of pants recently. And I realized, as I was trying to figure out what size I am, I've not bought non-elastic pants since moving to the Bay Area.

The Bay Area is elastic pant land, right? It just, that's how good life is. You never have to wear a belt. Never have to wear a belt here.

But for those of you who are, who see the desolation, there is comfort. There is comfort. Seeing salvation begins with seeing the desolation.

But the second thing that Simeon sees is God. Seeing desolation alone leads to cynicism. Plenty of people see what's wrong and become bitter.

Just go on social media. But Simeon sees something else. It says he's waiting for the consolation of Israel. And that phrase comes straight from Isaiah 40.

[13 : 34] Isaiah 40, which says, comfort. Comfort my people, says your God. Isaiah has spent 39 chapters telling about the destruction and the desolation that Israel is going to go through because of their own sin, their own turning against God.

And then all of a sudden, in Isaiah 40, God speaks a new note. And he says, comfort. Comfort. Consolation.

It's the same Greek word. Comfort. Comfort. My people, says your God. I'm going to come and I'm going to bring consolation. And so Simeon is waiting on this promise in Isaiah 40.

And what you wait for shapes what you see. Waiting is a type of seeing. Right? If you're stuck on the 80 and late for a meeting, all you see is the clock.

Right? If you're waiting for a vacation, you see suitcases everywhere. Simeon waits for consolation until he sees it coming. He knows, he trusts that God is bringing something else.

[14 : 44] Comfort is coming. Redemption is coming. Some of us see the promises so, some of us don't see the promises. Right? We see the desolation so clearly that it eclipses the promise.

But can we see the promises of God as bigger, better, more bold, and clear in our vision? His promises are the coming sunrise.

But even more than God's promises, Simeon sees God's presence with him. Luke emphasizes the Spirit three times.

Trying to get the point here. Verse 25 says, The Holy Spirit was upon him. Verse 26, The Holy Spirit revealed the promise.

And then verse 27, The Spirit moves him into the temple. Simeon sees the Spirit, the very presence of God with him. And some of you here, you know the past promises of God.

[15 : 43] You know your Bible. But you don't see the Spirit with you now. Do you see God now? In the here and the now.

Not just his promises. His presence. That's what Timon sees. Part of the problem is what Charles Taylor, a religious philosopher, calls the imminent frame.

He says, We Western moderns, we live in an imminent frame. Imminent, as in the opposite of the transcendent. We don't see a transcendent reality.

All of our cultural life emphasizes this worldly life. This worldly life. He's trying to diagnose, Why is it so hard to believe in God when it wasn't 70 years ago?

Why is it so hard? Because everything in our culture tries to tell us that there's not some transcendence. That we live in a frame, like a house, that cuts off the outside, the outer transcendent supernatural world.

[17:00] The imminent frame is the modern habit of seeing the world as closed to God. But listen, the gospel opens our eyes to a world alive with his presence.

Against the imminent frame is the Holy Spirit that Simeon sees. And you see, it's the Spirit who enables sight. In the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, each person of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, all perfectly and equally God, each one of them has a different role, a different job in salvation.

And the Holy Spirit does two main things regarding vision. first, the Spirit heals our vision. The Spirit is an ophthalmologist, an optical surgeon.

He removes our cataracts, and He cuts out our natural lenses to give us new eyes. But second, the Spirit leads us to Jesus. Like a theater, spotlight operator, the Spirit's job is not to draw attention to Himself, but to illuminate Christ.

And that's exactly what the Spirit does for Simeon. The Spirit speaks to Simeon first about the Lord's Messiah, and then He leads him to the temple where Jesus is, where He can behold Jesus with His own eyes.

[18:18] Luke is telling us something about what the Spirit does. The Spirit leads us to see Jesus. Simeon doesn't technically see the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit, but Simeon is moved by the Spirit, and he sees Jesus, which is seeing the Holy Spirit. So friends, let me ask you a question. Do you see the Spirit?

Do you see the Spirit moving in your life now? So how do we see salvation? We must first see the desolation, and we must see God's promise and presence with Him.

But here's another question. How do we know that we've seen it? How do we know that we've seen salvation? Three fruits that we know. First, praise.

When you see salvation, praise comes out. When Simeon sees Jesus finally in the temple, he doesn't say silence. He sings. He says, My soul, my eyes, have seen your salvation.

[19:25] Seeing leads to speaking and singing. You know this instinctively. The things that you love, the things that you enjoy, the things that you see and are beautiful. You speak them.

You tell others about them. Hey, I went to this restaurant. It was so good. You got to go there and see it yourself. Taste it yourself. Speaking, complete seeing.

And sitting in sight, though, it's not only praise. It actually leads to a grander vision of God. You see, as Simeon is seeing this, this is not just about the consolation of Israel.

God is not coming. Jesus is not coming for just this one little people. God is coming to save the whole world. Isn't that a bigger and more beautiful picture of who God is and who his salvation is? We have such little views of God and what he's doing. We naturally are selfish. We're blinkered in our vision.

[20:32] We so often just see God doing this one little thing. And God, when we see him, when we see him in his spirit, he wants to blow that up and say, hey, I am not only the God of you, I'm the God of the world.

The God of the universe. And I'm doing something in the world that's going to have, it's going to utterly transform it. It says in verse 31, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of your people Israel.

This is actually the larger narrative point of Simeon's song. This salvation that God is bringing, it's for the whole world. And verse 33, it says that Mary and Joseph marveled at what was said about Jesus.

You see, the angels told him a lot about who Jesus would be and what he'd do, but it was all about Israel. Simeon comes and tells him that Jesus is the Savior of the world.

So when we see Jesus, when we see salvation, we praise. We praise a bigger God than we thought existed. second fruit.

[21 : 48] When we see salvation, we see the price. Simeon's initial prayer of praise is full of triumph and victory. It's beautiful. But there's unfortunately more.

He gives a prophecy in verses 34 and 35, like a post-credits scene, like a Marvel movie. Right? The story is not all roses. The villain is still afoot.

But Simeon lowers his voice and he says, hey, this child will be opposed. When he speaks to Mary, he says, your sword will pierce your soul.

Pierced. Stabbed. Run through. And for Mary, it's metaphorical. Right? It's her soul. But for her son, for her son, this is the price of this great salvation that Simeon has just sung about.

It is piercing, not only of his soul, but of his body. This baby, this infant that Simeon is holding and looking at, his little hands are going to get pierced.

[23 : 02] His side, his little bulging infant side, is going to get stabbed with the spear. That's the price. The soft head of this infant drenched by blood someday as thorns are hammered into the scalp as a mocked up crown.

This is the price of salvation that God who comes to be seen will be crucified. Jesus on the cross for you and for me.

Entering in, this God entering in to the desolation of our lives. He will know our desolation. He will feel it intimately on his suffering, in his suffering.

Do you see the price of your salvation? Do you see the love that God has for you, friends? God loves you. that this is the price of that love.

It's the Lord Jesus. And finally, the fruit. When we see salvation, peace comes. Verse 29, Simeon says, Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace.

[24 : 20] We don't know for sure how old Simeon is. The text doesn't tell us. Church tradition infers that he's quite old. His story is paired with Anna, who's at least in her 80s.

One church tradition says that he's 112 years old. But it's also inferred because Simeon's song is amusing on death. Now that he has seen and held salvation, he is at peace in his life.

And in a sense, he says, Hey, Lord, now you can take me. Now you are letting your servant depart. Dismissal. Dismiss, depart. That means death. He's saying, Hey, I have seen salvation, and you can dismiss me in peace.

There's nothing more in this earth that I want or need. I have everything I need. Friends, when we have seen salvation, we have this peace.

It surpasses understanding. standing. A pastor, a friend of mine in his early 40s, passed away from cancer this last year.

[25 : 32] He had two kids under seven years old and a wife and they miss him dearly. One of the most beautiful testimonies about that death is he had this firm peace.

He knew where he was going. He had seen Jesus. He had seen his salvation. Even if Simeon is, let's pretend Simeon is not old.

Maybe he is in his 40s. And he is saying, Hey, if I have nothing else in this life, I don't need to do anything else because I have seen God. I have seen God's love and that's everything that I need. There is a peace that comes when we have seen God and seen his salvation that we can actually face the darkest desolation because we know because we've seen God.

And actually, if you know Jesus, that's the end. Do you realize that? When you die, the highest good, the beatific vision is how the ancient theologians and Christians called it, is that you see Jesus.

[26 : 45] That's everything. That's everything. It's the highest good. It's when you will be most at peace and most happy. So friends, summing up, let me just make a couple quick meditations.

Three applications. Do you see like Simeon? Do you see God? Are you looking for God? Simeon's story is unique. He's promised a beautiful promise to see the Messiah of close and personal.

But at the same time, his very message is that he's not unique. He says all of us can see the Lord's salvation. This is for the nations, the world. This is the light of the world.

Come in. And so he wants you, Simeon wants everyone to see what he's seen. And you can. You can. This is meant for the world. And some of you think that God is hiding, that he doesn't want to be seen by you.

But don't you see the efforts and the lengths that God wants? You too see him? Right? God is like a dad of a two-year-old boy playing hide and seek.

[27 : 55] When he hides, he's just around the corner and he peeks his foot out so his little two-year-old can see exactly where he is. because the joy of that is for him to grab his son and hug him.

He wants to be seen. Your God wants you to see him. Open your eyes. But Simeon also ends with something crucial.

It says Simeon took him up in his arms. You see salvation is not an it to be seen. It's a he. It's a person.

And seeing is not enough. You have to hold it. You have to take it into your own hands. There's this beautiful delicate way. I love when new mothers are holding their newborns.

And when they hand them off to you, it's like this is the most precious thing. You have to remember how to hold a baby. It's weird. This head's going to fall off. And you have to very tenderly take it to you and hold it.

[29 : 00] that's what our salvation is. It's given to you. You have to take Jesus into your own hands and hold him to your chest.

Some of you see salvation. You understand the claims of Christianity, but you've never held it. You've never taken it into your arms. And you have to take it into your arms every day.

No one picks up a newborn once when they've been born to them. They take them up every day, every hour. That is what it is. That's what it is to know the gospel, to hold the gospel, to see the gospel.

And finally, we have to train our eyes to see. And the way we train sight is through prayer. The Son of Simeon has long been a beloved prayer and song in the church.

And you know where the principal place the church has used this prayer? Every evening. Every evening, when you look at the liturgical prayers, the evening prayers, they always end, going back to the fourth century, the church has said this is one of the best ways to end your day in prayer.

[30 : 15] Why? Why? Lord, now you can dismiss your servant in peace, for my eyes have seen your salvation.

You see what that's saying every day? Every day it's saying, hey, I can go to bed in peace. Why? Because I've seen my Savior today.

I've seen salvation today. And that trains our hearts and our minds to look back over every day and say, where did I see God work today?

Oh, I have a Savior. I have a Savior. Sometimes it's easy, right? Lord, I've seen your salvation today. I've walked with your spirit today. Other days, we say this prayer in faith.

We don't feel saved. We're in need of salvation. It's been a terrible day. We've yelled at our kids. We've yelled at our spouse. We've been grumpy. And we pray it less as a statement and more as a hope, a question.

[31 : 14] My eyes have seen your salvation. And yet, even in that midst, God meets us in that prayer. Oh, let me give you more salvation.

I am your Savior. And therefore, we can depart in peace. We can go to bed and go to sleep. So let me challenge you this new year. pray the prayer of Simeon.

Every night. Every evening. And as you go about your year, ask God, may your fundamental prayer this year, for year, 2026, be, may I see you.

May I see your salvation. In X, I see your salvation in this relationship, in my family. May I see your salvation at work. May that be your prayer.

Father, friends, salvation is not just something we believe in. It's something we see and hold. Would you pray with me? Oh, Father in heaven, again, I want to pray a very simple prayer.

[32 : 22] May we see with Simeon's eyes. May we see you, oh, Lord. Lord, if there's anyone in here that sees you and is not held you, Lord, would you work in their hearts, work in their minds, and may they take you as their own.

May they hold you, the Savior, close to their chest. And Lord, would you train us to be a people who see you, who don't miss out, oh, God. Give us the peace.

Give us the praise, oh, Lord, of having been with you, of having seen you. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen. Amen.