

Simeon's Song

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[0 : 0 0] So we're in Luke chapter 2, and we've been going through a series called The Songs of Advent, where every week we're looking at a different song or prophecy that explains who Jesus is in the book of Luke.

So we've looked at Mary's song, we've looked at Zechariah's song, we've looked at the angel's song, and this morning we're looking at Simeon's song. Okay? This is just after Jesus was born, and we're going to start reading in verse 21.

And at the end of eight days, that is eight days after Jesus was born, when Jesus was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

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 turtle doves or two young pigeons.

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. 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.

[1 : 3 1] 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, 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 the Gentiles, excuse me, a light of revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people.

And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. 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.

And a sword will pierce through your soul also, so that the thoughts from many hearts may be revealed. Amen. This is God's word. Amen. Well, it's a simple question we're asking this morning.

Why did Simeon sing? That's all we're going to ask. Why did Simeon sing? And if you read the passage carefully, you see why he sang. It's because what he was waiting for, the consolation of Israel.

[2 : 5 4] He was waiting. We don't know how many years, but probably a long time. And he sees in Jesus his own consolation. That's why Simeon sings.

He sees in Jesus his own consolation. And so we're going to look at just two things this morning that explain that. Number one, what does it mean that Jesus is the consolation?

And then number two, what made Simeon see? Okay, that's all we're doing this morning. What does it mean that Jesus is the consolation and what made Simeon see? And the first thing that we have to know is that consolation in this passage is often not what we think about when we talk about consolation.

You know, when I was a kid, I was well acquainted with the word consolation because I was terrible at baseball. And so when you're not good at something, right, in our world, you get what? The consolation prize, which means you're not the best, but you get something still.

You get a consolation. And there is a connection between that word and what it's talking about here, but they're not the same thing. A consolation here is a word of comfort for the grieving.

[4 : 01] And that is what you get when you lose something and you get a consolation prize. It's a word of comfort to the grieving. But that's what it means. It's a word of comfort to the grieving. That's what Simeon is looking for. He's looking for a word that can console grief.

In other words, Simeon is grieving and he's looking for an answer to that. Now, the grief that Simeon had, he calls it the consolation of Israel.

The grief that Simeon had, that Israel had, there's a lot of reasons they could have been grieving. You know, they were a country that had for hundreds of years experienced warfare, conquest.

If you were living in Israel at this time, you were living in occupied territory. The Romans controlled everything that happened in that country. You could have been grieving because Israel was the story of a long line of really bad kings, right?

That just got worse and worse and worse. And any leader, any Jewish leader in Israel at this time was probably not a good person, right? It was hard to find a leader you could put your hope in in this time period.

[5 : 04] All these bad reasons. And we can just stop there for a moment. And you can already take a lesson from that, which is that in an unexpected way, Christmas, Christmas dignifies the place of grief in our lives.

And it actually invites us to bring our grief to the forefront. Because to be looking for a consolation like Simeon was is to say that you have a grief that needs to be consoled.

And so that's what Simeon is doing. He is a person waiting in grief for a word that can be spoken to his grief that can make it better. And he's exemplary in that way.

Simeon is held up, not because he did something, but because he didn't do something, because he waited. And, you know, I suppose maybe 50 years ago or 60 years ago, you know, the bad way that people dealt with grief often was just to ignore it and to bury it.

And I think the way that we often deal with grief that's unhealthy in our world is that we just get bit. We get ourselves busy, so busy that we don't even take time to grieve when things go wrong.

[6 : 13] And, you know, we either don't take time for it or we numb our grief with things that can't really solve our grief. And so the wound, the wound of grief festers.

And here's Simeon. Simeon is prepared to wait. He's prepared to wait for something that can speak to his grief. And if you know the Bible, you know that's a key theme across all scriptures is waiting on the Lord.

And if you're waiting on the Lord, that means something's not going okay. You're waiting for him to answer a question that you don't have an answer to, or you're waiting on him to explain, why is this happening to me?

Waiting, implicitly in waiting, is grief, right? There's lots of reasons that we could grieve at Christmastime, okay? But I think there is also a central reason why Simeon is grieving.

And you've got to know your Old Testament to know why he's grieving. But one of the most famous passages, and we read it, if you remember, we read it the first Sunday of Advent. Caleb and Christy came up and read it.

[7 : 15] Isaiah 40. It's one of the best prophecies about Jesus. And it starts like this. Isaiah says, comfort, comfort. And the word comfort there is the same word consolation.

So console, console. Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and cry to her that her warfare has ended. And, this is the important part, that her iniquity has been pardoned.

Her iniquity has been pardoned. So if your world is centered around the Old Testament like Simeon's was, and you've got a passage like Isaiah 40, what Isaiah 40 is saying is that Israel is a people in grief.

And the heart of that grief is their sin. It's not the warfare, even though that is part of their grief. The heart of their grief is the sin that brought about all the bad things that happened to them.

It's the sin. And the comfort. In the same passage, you see that the comfort, the consolation that God offers to his people, that he prophesies, that he promises ahead of time, is the consolation is pardon.

[8 : 26] It's mercy. You know, that's what Simeon is looking for. He's grieving because of Israel's sin, but he's looking for the consolation, the proof of pardon.

And that's important. One writer that wrote an article about consolation, and she put it like this. She said, The consolation of the gospel is not, the consolation of the gospel is not that you and I are better than we believe.

Because that's one way that you could console yourself, is to say, I'm really not as bad as the Bible says. But that's not the consolation of the gospel. It's not that we're better than we believe, or that we deserve less punishment than we thought.

It's that God is more merciful than we realize. That's the consolation of the gospel. That God, in his mercy, can pardon even people like us, even what we've done.

And so that's what Simeon's waiting for. And when he sees Jesus for the first time, his eyes lock onto this baby child, and he knows, he knows this is the consolation.

[9 : 33] Somehow, this is the way that God is going to bring mercy to his people who are grieving because of their sin. And, you know, you've got to read the whole Bible to understand the whole Bible, right?

And this passage doesn't tell us everything about the gospel. But what it, I think it actually does give us hints about how Jesus will be the consolation for Israel.

And the hint, which you could read right past, is how much emphasis Luke puts on the law in this passage. You know, I'll always make this point just to think about how important every word in the gospels is.

You know, these gospel accounts, Luke's like 24 chapters, and it's 24 chapters to explain the most important life of the greatest man who ever lived. And so every word counts. So anytime you read the gospels, you've got to say, why would he put that in there?

When he could have put a miracle or something else. Why would he, why would he say that, take time to say that Jesus was circumcised on the eighth day? But Luke does that. He takes so much emphasis here to talk about how when Jesus was born, he was, everything that was done in his birth had to do with the law.

[10 : 43] So it says in verse 21, he was circumcised on the eighth day, like any good Jewish boy was. And then in verse 22, it says, they went to Jerusalem for their purification, according to the law of Moses.

Now, you know, a Jew would have known exactly what this meant. In, in Leviticus chapter 12, there's a law that says, when a woman has a boy, she is ritually unclean for 40 days.

And so what she has to do is she has, after she has the child, after 40 days, which is the period that's going on right here, she has to go make a sacrifice to make herself clean again. And then, so that's part of the purification that it's talking about.

And then he says in Exodus, he says there, as it's written in the law, the Lord, every male who opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord. In Exodus 13, you remember the story of the Passover?

Passover in the Passover, God said, I'm going to come through and I'm going to take the life of every firstborn in the land. But you can save your firstborn.

[11 : 45] If you kill a lamb and put the lamb's blood over the door seal of your house. And that's what happened. And in all the generations after that, God still said, you know, all because of what happened, because I redeemed the firstborn in Israel during the Exodus, every firstborn in Israel from now until the end of time, every firstborn in Israel is mine.

And so you have to make a sacrifice to redeem that child as an atonement for his life. And that's why Jesus has to go to the temple for a sacrifice to be made. Now, those laws may sound like gibberish to you, but you don't have to know all the details of the law to understand the point I'm trying to make, which is that Luke is taking a lot of time here to say, Jesus and his parents followed the law.

And there's a reason. Because Luke is giving evidence of something that Paul tells us in Galatians, which is really important for you and me. In Galatians 4, Paul says this, he says, when the fullness of time came, God sent forth his son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

Luke is saying all this to say, you see, from the day that Jesus was born, he was put under the law. Okay? Now, part of that you may understand intuitively, which is that from the day that Jesus was born, he was always going to follow the law.

Right? He was always going to be righteous. He was always going to do exactly what the law commanded. But there's also, what this also means, and this is the important point this morning, what it also means is that when Jesus, when it says that he went under the law, it also means that he stood where we stand in relation to the law, which is to say, he wasn't just obligated to keep the law, it's that he stood like a sinner under the law.

[13 : 45] Okay? He stood where lawbreakers stand under the law. Think about it like this. There's so many laws in the Old Testament, if you think about it, these purification rules that sound so strange to us, so many of the laws in the Old Testament weren't just about being good or bad.

A lot of the laws that God gave Old Testament Israel were assuming, they assumed that we were unclean, and that we were evil, and that, for instance, we needed atonement made for our sins.

And so when Jesus comes, he doesn't just make a commitment to always do what the law requires, he makes a commitment to identify as a sinner. You know, so, not that, you know, like we told the kids, not that he did sin, but he identified as a sinner.

He stood under the law as a sinner. So, for instance, you know, he, a sacrifice is made for Jesus to atone for his life, to redeem his life. And, something, Jesus belonged to God from the day he was born.

He belonged to God from eternity past, and yet he stands under the law as one who needed to be redeemed. I think this is most clearly seen in Luke's, in Jesus' baptism. Did you know that Jesus was baptized?

[14 : 56] Every gospel account says it. And have you ever wondered to yourself, you know, if baptism is all about being made clean, if baptism is all about washing away sins, why would Jesus ever step forward for baptism?

And, and you know that it's strange. It's a strange idea because when, when he came to John the Baptist, John the Baptist looked at him and said, you, you want me to baptize you? You should baptize me. But Jesus knew what he was doing and he knew that he was sinless.

But what he's doing is he's washing himself as a sign that he is one with his people. Okay. You know, think about it like this. You ever seen those, in every great superhero movie, like a Superman movie, like a Superman movie, there's always that scene where this giant object is coming out of the sky and it's about to crush someone, a bystander.

And so the cameras, you know, you see the, you see the rock coming down, you see the person and they're, they're terrified. and then the camera zooms in on the person waiting for the rock to crush them and then it doesn't and they look up and they realize that there is Superman holding up the boulder.

It's something like that. Something like that where Jesus comes and he stands with us to prevent us from being crushed by this object and the object is not a rock. It's the law of God because all of us, as the Bible says, fall short of the law and Jesus stands under the law to protect us from getting crushed except it's not like Superman because, you know, Superman holds up the rock and just throws it away but Jesus couldn't just throw away the law like it didn't matter because that would mean that God is unjust.

[16 : 35] The law doesn't matter and the law does matter. There is right and wrong in this world and Jesus never ignores that so what does he do? He stands under the law, protects us from the law and he takes in himself the punishment of the law.

You see, all that is being foreshadowed in this idea that here's Jesus, this little baby going under the law to stand with us under the law to redeem us, to save us from the curse of the law.

Okay? And you see this all over Scripture. You know these passages like Isaiah 53? What does it say? In very Superman imagery it says he was crushed for our iniquities.

He was literally crushed by the weight of the law for our iniquities. And then, you know, he has put him to grief. Christ, you see what, Christ redeemed you and I from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.

That's what Paul says. He became, you know, we just told the kids, we just told the kids, you know, if you've had an emotion in life, grief, you can know that Jesus knows what that's like because he became one like us.

[17 : 45] And Isaiah says he became acquainted with grief. That's why Jesus stands at the tomb of his best friend Lazarus and what does he do? He cries. He weeps for his friend Lazarus.

He came down from heaven and chose to become acquainted with grief for us. So that, what? So that we might grieve no more.

Okay? So, what are we trying to say here? Simeon. Simeon's looking at this baby. He's looking for the consolation of Israel and the consolation is that this little baby is going to stand under the law for us and he will take our grief.

He will take our grief. He'll bring an end to death itself. And if you want to know the power, if you want to know the power of what it means to believe that Jesus is your consolation, you look at, look at how Simeon responds.

What does he do? He takes, he takes this child up into his arms and he, he finds peace. He literally, he basically says, I can die now.

[18 : 47] I can die now because what? Because I have seen with my eyes, I have seen the salvation of my people. What does he say? I've seen the salvation that you've prepared for the nations.

If you believe that Jesus is the consolation, then even death, in the words of Paul, loses its sting. Paul, Paul, Paul believes so much that Jesus is the consolation of Israel that he, in Corinthians, he starts making fun of death, right?

He says, oh, oh, death, where, where is your sting? Oh, grave, where is your victory? He laughs in the face of death. And that's the power of believing that Jesus is our consolation, that he can do away with our grief, okay?

You know, in the book of Common Prayer, which is, it's an Anglican book that's used by millions of people across the world to kind of guide their prayer life throughout the day.

At the end of the day, when it gives you all these recommended prayers that you can pray, at the end of the day, oftentimes the recommended prayer is Simeon's song. And because you read this song, and you realize you and I could pray this, right?

[19 : 57] You and I, when we're laying in bed at night, we could pray this prayer because it's all about saying, Lord, I can give this day over to you. I can give my life over to you, and if I were to leave today, if this were the last day, I could leave this world in peace because I've already seen your salvation.

I've already seen your promises, okay? That's part of the gospel this morning is that Simeon's prayer, if you're a Christian, Simeon's prayer is your prayer, okay?

So, that's what it means to say Jesus is the consolation. He comes to bear the weight of the law for us. Now, briefly, what made Simeon see? Okay? Simeon could see that Jesus was the consolation, but what made him see?

Now, Simeon's a strange character. We know hardly anything about him, and that fact may actually tell us something about him, that he's not an important person. All it tells us is that he's righteous, he's devout, and he's waiting for the hope of Israel.

But his gift, the one thing we know about him that makes him worthy of running down in the book of Luke is that he could see Jesus, okay? So you imagine this scene, there's thousands of people running to and fro at the temple, and Mary and Joseph are with this little baby boy to make the sacrifice, and you've got all these people running around, and then out of nowhere, this old man comes up to Mary and Joseph, and he says something to the effect of, this is the kid, this is the kid, and he takes the baby into his arms.

[21 : 27] Have you ever had a little baby, and someone kind of just grabbed your baby from you, and you didn't feel comfortable with that at all? Maybe that's what happened here. But Simeon can see when no one else can see.

Simeon can see that this is the Christ child. This is the one that all of Israel has been waiting for. And that alone illustrates a fact that's true as much today as it was for Simeon, that you can be in the presence of Jesus and not see him, right?

Jesus can be all around you. You can read about him and still, in a very real way, not see him. And Simeon himself actually points that out. Did you notice that in some of the strange, at the end of this passage, there's some strange things that Simeon says.

Look what he says. He says, to Mary, behold, this child is appointed for the fall and the rising of many in Israel and for a sign that is opposed.

And a sword will pierce through your soul also so that the thoughts from many hearts may be revealed. But notice that part. This child is appointed for the fall and the rising of many in Israel.

[22 : 36] What is he saying? He's saying, this child is going to do a lot of good for a lot of people. But a lot of people are going to pass by Jesus.

They're going to come face to face with him. They're going to see who he is. They're going to see his power. And when they see it, they will fall. They will stumble. And you don't see that on the Christmas card often, right?

Jesus, the one who makes some people stumble. But all the gospel writers bring this up, this fact that so many people see Jesus and they walk away.

They are just as much offended by him as some people are enamored by him. That's why, even in the Old Testament, there's a way that the prophets would describe Jesus and they would say this.

This is Isaiah 8. Jesus will become, talking about the Messiah, they said, and he will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to Israel.

[23 : 40] Paul says the same thing. Jesus is folly to the Gentiles and he's a stumbling stone to the Jews. And he's really just saying some people will look at Jesus and they'll reject him.

They just don't get it at all. And you can see why. You know, we try to make Christmas fresh every year. But think about those people who would have passed by Jesus, you know, when he's laying in a manger.

And imagine if you had stood by a bystander seeing Jesus laying in a manger and saying to that person, you know, do you know that that is actually the Son of God? That is the Redeemer of all God's people laying there in the feeding trough of the cow?

And the person would say, no way. That's crazy. Because God would never do that. The God of all the universe would never send his child in a feeding trough.

He would never do that. And also, or think about it like this, you know, when Jesus, when he grows up, think about how often he confronted people with their sins and that was the point of stumbling. They would say, Jesus can't be the Son of God because I can't be as bad as he says that I am.

[24 : 41] That's what the Pharisees said, what the Sadducees said, okay? Jesus was a stumbling block and Simeon says that. But let me close with this. Two things. Well, the one question, how did Simeon see Jesus?

If Simeon himself knows that so many people will walk by Jesus and stumble rather than rise up, how did Simeon see Jesus? And you get two answers from the passage. The first one is this, and they hang together.

The first one is, Simeon saw Jesus because the Holy Spirit revealed Jesus to Simeon. And you see that emphasized over and over again.

The Spirit told Simeon that Jesus would come. The Spirit led Simeon into the temple and he knew when he saw the baby, the Spirit showed him that's who Jesus was.

And, you know, that's a unique situation. You know, maybe the Spirit doesn't talk to us as clearly as it talked to Simeon. But it does illustrate a point that you and I cannot see Jesus the way we need to see Jesus unless the Spirit is speaking to us.

[25 : 47] Unless the Holy Spirit shows us His glory and shows us His greatness. And you see that, remember when Peter, when Jesus looks at Peter and He says, Peter, who am I? He'd been with Jesus for a long time but He was still putting the pieces together.

And finally Peter says, you are the chosen one. You're the Messiah. And what does Jesus say to him? Simon, Bar-Jonah, son of Jonah, flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but my Father in heaven.

In other words, He's saying, Peter, you would have never figured that out on your own. You needed, you needed the Heavenly Father to show you what was true. Okay? So that's part of the truth here is to see Jesus for who He really is.

We need the Father to show us. We need the Holy Spirit to show us who Jesus is so that He's not just a person on a page. Okay? Lastly, I'm going to close with this. How else, how else can we say that Simon saw Jesus?

Simeon saw Jesus. How did he know? Well, because he was looking for Him. Simeon found Jesus because he had been looking. That's what we talked about at the very beginning.

[26 : 52] He was waiting for the consolation of Israel and he was looking for the consolation. He was looking for Jesus. And so, I think that that is the question to leave with this morning is, are you looking for Jesus?

Even if you found Him, are you still looking for Him? What does that mean? Do you sense that you need Him? Do you sense that your sin is such that you need Jesus to come and to bring consolation to it?

Do you sense in your life a need that only He can fill? That's what it means to look for Him. It's not just saying, I'm ready to see Him. It's saying, I'm looking for Him in the sense that I think that Jesus might have something that only He can offer.

That's what it means to be looking for Jesus. And then when you look for Him, you're trusting that the Father will show Him to you. Okay? There was an old writer, I think it was Martin Luther, who said, to know Jesus is to know His benefits.

So when I talk about looking for Jesus, I'm not just saying wanting to see Him face to face. I'm saying, knowing who He can be for us, knowing how He can change our lives, and how He can work in our grief.

[28 : 11] Okay? That's good news. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, let this word settle into our hearts and our waiting help us to wait for Jesus, to look for Him, and we trust that You will reveal Him to us through the power of Your Holy Spirit.

And Your sons, then we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.