

Simeon's Prayer

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- [0 : 0 0] Amen. Whenever I read these words, 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. I'm afraid one of the things that comes to mind is an old television program, Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy, because this song was always sung at the end of each episode.
- And I wish I could sing, because it was sung beautifully. But of course it was not a song, it was a prayer said by Simeon.
- And it's been taken from there, and used in the anchor service, as one of the prayers they use in the evening. I don't know whether you have ever waited for anything.
- Anybody here waited for anything? Yes. What have you waited for? Oh, you've got a sore throat. Oh, golly.
- [1 : 2 2] Oh, that is so sad. God, I love hearing your voice singing. Oh, dear. Anybody waiting for anything? Yes? Before Christmas, one hopes.
- I know, once here we had... Oh, yes. The bus. Yes. Yes, yes. Waiting, waiting, waiting. That's right. Though buses...
- Well, certainly the 37. I know they say buses always come in twos. Certainly the 37 still seems to follow that particular pattern. I can never understand where you're in Herne Hill, and there's two 37s there, and they've only just come from Peckham.
- I don't know how that works, but anyway. A miracle of timing. So I don't know what you like waiting, whether it makes you fed up. I hate waiting.
- I really hate waiting. I hate waiting for buses. I hate waiting for trains. I hate waiting for anything. I hate waiting in the doctors. Yeah, I hate it. Even though nowadays, because of buses, they do tell you 185's coming in 10 minutes.
- [2 : 3 6] Ha! Train station. Train coming in. 10 past 12. No. 10 past 17. No.
- No. Sometime it's coming. So it's good to see it's going to come sometime. So, you know, I've been waiting to hear the result of some tests from a doctor or hospital, waiting for exam results, waiting for the result of a job interview, waiting for the birth of our first, second, and third child come to that.
- And I've been in all those situations. And they can be worrying times. Now, I can remember, and it shows you what a good memory I've got, getting the envelope for my GCE results.
- And that shows you how old I am, because they were GCEs, not GCSEs. And I got them. And I can remember my hands trembling.
- I don't know why, because I knew I'd done rubbish. And the results proved I'd done rubbish. I managed to get to English and religious knowledge.
- [3 : 4 6] So, I don't know. But anyway, waiting. It can be a terrible thing sometimes. Well, Simeon had been waiting. He'd been waiting for someone.

Now, we don't know much about Simeon. In fact, there's a lot we don't know about Simeon. We don't know when and how the Holy Spirit revealed to him that he would not die before he saw the Messiah, the consolation of Israel.

We don't know for how long he'd been waiting. The impression we get is that it was probably a long time he'd been waiting. We don't know how old he was. We don't know what position, if any, he held in the temple.

We do not know whether he came to the temple every day. We read that Anna came to the temple every day, fasted and prayed every day. But it doesn't say that about Simeon. So, whether he came to the temple every day, waiting to meet the Messiah, he'd been promised to see.

But what we do know is that he was righteous and devout, and that he turned up at the temple on this day, guided by the Spirit. Now, it's important that Jesus was circumcised according to the Jewish law set out in Genesis 17.

[5 : 04] A male must be circumcised on the eighth day. At the same time, he was given the name Jesus, which means Savior, a name given by the angel to Mary. Now, the circumcision probably took place at Nazareth.

But after this, Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to Jerusalem from Nazareth, about four miles away, so not a very long journey. They came to the temple at Jerusalem, the center of God's presence at that time, the meeting place between the divine and the human.

They came for two reasons. First, the presentation or consecration of Jesus as a firstborn, set out in Exodus 13. And then the purification of Mary, required under the law after birth, set out in Leviticus.

So Mary was required 40 days after the birth to offer a lamb and dove or pigeon. And if she was too poor, it was to offer a second dove or pigeon in place of the lamb.

So we read that Mary offered two doves. So that meant it was offering of a poor person. Mary and Joseph weren't rich.

[6 : 19] They weren't rich enough to afford a lamb. So this circumcision of Jesus and the purification of Mary underlines that Jesus was born a Jew and his family was subject to Jewish law.

As Paul said to the Galatians, Jesus was born under the law to redeem those who were under the law. So he was born a Jew, lived a Jew, died a Jew, was resurrected as a Jew.

And so it was important that those things happened for him. And I came to the temple. Now, the temple was a large place, some 35 acres.

For those who know these things, that's 17 football pitches. Most of you are. But more importantly, it's about a third the size of Brockwell Park. And almost exactly the size of Ruskin Park.

So that shows you how big the temple was. It took up a large part of Jerusalem. Now, Simeon, no, how did Simeon know that it was this family, among the many families that were there, and this baby, among the many babies that were probably there, that these were the ones he was waiting for?

[7 : 41] And as before, the Spirit led him to the temple. The Spirit led him to Jesus and the family. And so Simeon appears to have had this special sensitivity to the Spirit.

We read often that he had this message from the Spirit that he would see the Messiah before he died. He had a message from the Spirit to go to the temple, and the Spirit led him to Joseph, Mary, and Jesus.

So that's something we can learn. We can have a sensitivity to the Spirit. Let's listen to what God is saying through his Spirit. Now, the first thing Simeon did was to touch Jesus and to take him in his arms.

What a wonderful occasion that must have been. Now, those of us who have had children, or even those who haven't had children, it is something wonderful about having a baby in your arms.

I still can't resist babies and having them in my arms if I get the chance to do so. But this was a really special occasion of Simeon.

[8 : 48] This was the person he'd been waiting for. We don't know how long for, but he'd been waiting for him. And this was the occasion when he had in his arms the Messiah.

It must have been a wonderful time for him at that particular time. After all this time waiting, Simeon was holding the promised Messiah in his arms.

In this young baby was the hope the Jews had been waiting so long for. And it was also in his arms was the hope for the rest of the world.

No wonder Simeon praised God. Now, most commentators take the first line of this prayer to mean that now that Simeon had met the Messiah, he was ready to die.

That doesn't mean, of course, that he died soon after he held Jesus, just that the purpose of his life had been fulfilled. But I also think it could mean that his job was done.

[9 : 56] I can... Simeon had fulfilled his task. He can now leave the temple because he'd seen the Messiah before he died.

Simeon, the servant of the Lord, had carried out his task. He had seen the Messiah. So as all of us, if we carry out our task as the servants of God, the servants of Jesus, we will be blessed.

But what would Simeon's idea of Messiah be? At that time, there's a wide range of beliefs about what the Messiah would be and what he would bring. There was a hope that he would free Israel from political domination, from the Romans, a warrior Messiah like King David.

He would come into Jerusalem on a horse, followed by an army, to bring freedom to Israel. Instead, Jesus came into Jerusalem on a donkey, not followed by an army, but followed by disciples.

But there were some in Jerusalem, some Jews who also thought the Messiah would establish, without violence, God's reign of faithfulness, justice, and peace.

[11 : 08] Now, Simeon would have known his Bible, what we now know as the Old Testament. And it is no surprise that when we look at Simeon's prayer, it has echoes of the scriptures that he knew.

So this prayer is firmly rooted in the purposes of God, set out in the Old Testament, especially as set out in Isaiah.

Just a few verses from Isaiah, just to show how the Old and the New Testament are interrelated. The Old Testament is part of God's history, part of God's revelation, and it leads to the New Testament, and it leads to Jesus Christ.

So in Isaiah we read, and the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it together, not just Jews, all people. And the Israelites have said, I will keep you, will make you to be a covenant for the people, and a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison, and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.

Those very words were used by Jesus, and saying, these words have been fulfilled in me. And that horrified some people, because basically he was saying, the person here saying these words is the Messiah.

[12 : 37] I am the Son of God. I am the person who's going to open the eyes of the blind. I am the person who's going to free captives from prison. I am the person who can release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.

I am the Messiah long promised. I am the person who's going to open the door. I am the person who's going to open the door. I am bringing my righteousness near. It is not far away, and my salvation will not be delayed.

And again to the Jews, he says, I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth. Elizabeth's saying that, in that little film, which I thought was lovely actually, it's open to all.

That baby born in Bethlehem, in a stable, it wouldn't have been clean.

It might not have been dirty, it wouldn't have been clean. It probably would have been cold. It's open to everybody. It's big enough for the whole of the nations.

[13 : 49] And all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God. So that's some of the verses that Simeon used when he said his prayer, and he blessed Jesus.

He knew his Old Testament, and it, I think, behoves us to look at the Old Testament in the light of the New, but to show that God's plan started with Genesis 1, and ends with Revelation 21.

And there's a whole history of what God is doing, working through the history of his people, the Jews, and his people, us now. So, read the Old Testament.

Not necessarily Leviticus, though. These passages all show that God's plan was always, always, from the start, that his salvation would be known and available to all peoples of the world, and that it would be Israel who would be the light for the Gentiles.

God's plan starts with, but does not end with Israel. Israel. For Israel would be the means by which God's revelation would be known to all humanity, to everyone.

[15 : 10] And the plan of Jesus, the plan of God, has as its center Jesus Christ, who was born a Jew, and died a Jew, and had risen again as a Jew.

A Jew born in Israel, and only moved about Israel, and only lived in Israel after the time he went to Egypt. In case anybody picks me up on that. It would be the light of the world and its salvation.

So, the people of God, the Jews, through Jesus, would be the light to all of us. He would be the salvation for all of us.

And salvation is to be found only in Jesus. This little baby in Simeon's arms, this helpless baby, this baby who had to rely on his mum and dad for food and drink, and being looked after for protection.

This is what Simeon recognized in his prayer. This was the consolation of Israel he'd been waiting for. Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.

[16 : 21] Isaiah 41. Simeon saw that Jesus would be the person God would use to bring comfort to God's people. This baby would be the light to the Gentiles promised in Isaiah.

And as John says in his gospel, light has come into the world, and the darkness cannot overcome it, cannot defeat it. When Jesus came into the world, darkness was defeated forever.

It might not seem it now, but it is and will be. And when Jesus comes again, as Beverly prayed, we will know the kingdom of God in all its light.

But he also, Simeon said, would be for the glory of Israel. So Israel would be glorified, and glorified in some ways because Jesus was glorified by God.

But Jesus was not to be that warrior king that many had hoped for. He would not lead an army with weapons, but disciples followed the Spirit, who would teach, heal, cast out demons, and proclaim the kingdom of God was here.

[17 : 39] Not an earthly kingdom, but a kingdom in our hearts, where Jesus reigns in our lives and in our church. So Jesus was to be the salvation, not just for the Jews, but for all those who were not Jews.

This was a gospel preached by the early Christians. The sort of earliest sermon we have says that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, Peter, and then to the twelve.

So from the earliest times, Christians preach that Christ died for our sins and he rose again. And that message has never changed until today.

Jesus Christ was born, died for our sins, raised again, lived today, and can live in us by his spirit. So what can we learn from this story?

What can Simeon's prayer teach us? Well, what Simeon can teach us is it's good sometimes to wait, despite my disinclination to wait.

[18 : 55] In this day of instant satisfaction, when we can press a button, what we want is delivered the next day, depending. Again, the Bible is full of verses about waiting.

Wait for the Lord, be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord. We wait in hope for the Lord, he is our help and our shield. Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him.

And do not fret when people succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes. That's a difficult one, isn't it? We see evil people seeming to get on in life, doing well, getting rich and doing things that are horrible.

But God says, no, wait. In the end, there will come a time when I will show them justice. Oh, Lord, I'll wait for you.

You will answer, Lord, my God. We've all prayed for things and prayed for a long time. And sometimes things don't seem to happen.

[20 : 09] We have to wait. God does things in his own time, in his own way. And sometimes the answer isn't what we want. I remember a story, I think it was probably Mike Wheat said about George Verwa, how there was a group of people from a church who prayed for him specifically for years and years and years and years.

in the end, he came to know Jesus as his saviour and went on to form OM. Those people didn't stop.

They waited patiently on the Lord. And Paul said, therefore, judge nothing before the appointed time.

Wait until the Lord comes. So we are not judges on this earth. God is a judge of all the earth. And we don't point fingers.

We wait for God to come in Jesus and we wait then for justice to reign over all the earth. So what does waiting involve then?

[21 : 22] First of all, strength of heart. Knowing in our heart that God is there. knowing that God is our hope and shield. Knowing we must wait patiently.

We can't hurry God up. We can pray earnestly. But we must wait patiently and not worry about the success of wicked people. God will answer our God will answer that our hope is in God.

And we must wait quietly and come and return to God time and time again with our prayers. And in the end we must wait for the return of our Lord until our Lord Jesus Christ comes again.

Simeon's prayer wasn't actually the last words he said. To read a bit further on that the child's mother and father marveled at the words Simeon said.

Now this is the only time in the Gospels that Jesus Joseph is called the father of Jesus. Elsewhere it's just parents. But here he's called the father of Jesus. So Simeon blessed the family and they'd said something separately to Mary.

[22 : 39] He tells her that Jesus will cause the falling of many. The falling of those who do not accept Jesus as the Messiah. Who do not accept he has brought in the kingdom of God.

who do not accept his salvation. As Luke says later in his Gospel Jesus will be a stone causing people to fall. He will be a stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.

Those who don't want to follow Jesus those who reject him as saviour. And he will be a sign that is spoken about. That's true. Ever since Jesus walked on this earth Jesus has been spoken about.

Both negatively and positively. This is going on even today. But there will be some who Jesus calls to rise. The word there used is actually the same word as resurrection.

Those who see Jesus as the Messiah, the anointed one of God. Those who recognise that the kingdom of God has come in Jesus. That salvation will be found in him because he died for our sins, was buried, and rose on the third day and is alive today.

[23 : 54] And more worryingly, Jesus is someone who knows our thoughts. What we know and say will be revealed. Just a couple of incidents in the Gospels.

Jesus knew the thoughts of the Pharisees when they accused him of being Beelzebub. And he knew Peter would betray him. We cannot hide from God.

We cannot hide from Jesus. He knows us through and through. And that's sometimes a difficult thing, but it's a good thing. He knows our ups and he knows our downs.

He knows our sadnesses and our joys. He knows our wants. More importantly, he knows our needs. finally, Simeon said that Mary would suffer great anguish.

A sword, the word for that is not just a little sword, it's a big sword, would pierce her soul. Probably that means that her soul would be pierced because she saw the death of her son.

[25 : 01] any of us who've got children know that to see the death of a child would pierce our soul. And how much more for Mary when she saw her son, Jesus, dying.

But then she would know that he rose again. So she had that wonderful joy that he was alive. So Simeon is one of those people used by God, and we never hear of again.

This is the only passage in the Bible where we read and hear of Simeon. That he was given a promise that he would see the Messiah.

This was fulfilled when he took Jesus in his arms. And then he praised God in his prayer. saying, this child, this child in my arms, would be the one bringing God's salvation, the one bringing light to the Gentiles and glory to Israel.

My prayer is that all of us here today will be those who have seen the light of salvation in Jesus Christ. Amen.