

# "Holy Satisfaction" Luke 2:25–35

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Date: 21 December 2025

Preacher: Rev. Daniel Avitan

[ 0 : 00 ] So a bit of a story before we jump into God's word. Wednesday, April 17th, 2014, at 11am, the Iron Lady, the Right Honourable Baroness Margaret Thatcher of Kestevin! was laid to rest at St. Paul's Cathedral in London.

Her funeral was a state funeral attended by heads of state the world over, royalty and dignitaries. It had all the pomp and ceremony and to the delight of a minister, it was full of scripture, hymns and prayers.

For us this morning, I'm not going to do a deep dive into a funeral that happened 11 plus years ago, almost 12 years ago, but for us this morning, what is of particular note is the recessional hymn. When the coffin was taken out of St. Paul's, the Nunc Dimittis was sung. It was put to music and sung.

If the Nunc Dimittis is unfamiliar to you, no problem. It's the Song of Simeon. In fact, it is the song we'll be looking at this morning, starting in verse 29 and going to verse 32. It is also the song that is sung or prayed at the end of evening prayer every single day in the Book of Common Prayer.

[ 1 : 26 ] The Book of Common Prayer is scripture put to prayers that it's really part of our tradition in the Anglican world. The words are fitting for the bookend of one's day and especially of one's life, as one rests satisfied with a job well done.

So agree with her politics or not, I don't bring her up to get political, agree with her politics or not, Lady Thatcher accomplished a great deal in office and in life in general.

She came from humble beginnings. She led the United Kingdom through turbulent times, including the Cold War. She accomplished much. And I would think that at the end of her life, she had a degree of satisfaction for what she did.

She had a very, very rich and full public life. However, for the Lady Thatcher and for us this morning, if we were given some quiet, which is a bit of a hot commodity for some of us with young kids, if we were given some quiet to think about life and the things that truly matter and we felt comfortable with sharing from our heart of hearts, what would we describe as a life that is truly full, a life of complete satisfaction?

I think it's an important question for us to consider, regardless of where we are at in life. If you are visiting or new, we've been asking some big questions in light of these four songs for the Savior in Luke's early narrative in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 1 and 2.

[ 3 : 14 ] And we come finally to the Nunc Dimittis, which is just to say Latin for, now let your servant depart in peace, which is the opening line in the song. This prayer, this song of Simeon, has been in use in the church for at least since the 4th century.

It's very ancient, included in the daily prayers of God's people. And as such, it has deeply shaped generations of Christians to take stock of their life, whenever it would end, at the end of each day, in light of eternity.

And it helps us to ask this question. If my life were to end, would I depart in peace? If my life were to end, would I depart in peace?

A profound question, especially in our day. You know, we have a very interesting culture here in the West, and in Canada in particular.

On one hand, when we're considering death, on one hand, death is tucked away. It is unseen. We live in a very kind of sanitized time.

[ 4 : 28 ] We are not acquainted with death. And yet, there's a bizarre obsession with the experience of death as we are eager to read or watch accounts of people undergoing health treatments or end-of-life care, or to follow people as they post or vlog about their grief or loss.

It's a really interesting, I don't know if you want to call it a confusion, but maybe a lack of clarity around what death is and how we should live in light of it.

So, how should we prepare for the end? What must we do to live a life of true satisfaction? How can we, like Simeon, declare, Now, let us, thou, thy servant, depart in peace?

As we consider some of these questions, let's turn our attention to the final song for the Savior. And we're going to look at two things from the text. First, we're going to look at the strength of faith. And second, the satisfaction of peace.

A bit of a background just to orient us with the narrative before we jump into these two points. Mary has had the baby Jesus. And as per Jewish custom, after about 40 days, she is to present herself at the temple to be cleansed from ritual impurity.

[ 5 : 52 ] Now, I'm not going to get into this at length. Only just to say that Mary is going to the temple not because she has sinned, necessarily, but because the law of Moses says that she has to offer sacrifice for her ritual impurity.

Now, not only are they at the temple making the trip from Nazareth to the temple in Jerusalem for that purpose, but also Jesus being the firstborn out of Mary is, again, according to the scriptures, he has to be redeemed.

I won't get into that. Only just to point out that Mary and Joseph, although they are very poor, and we know they're poor because the sacrifice that they offer is not a lamb, but two doves, which is like the very minimum for poor people to offer in the temple, that they are devout people, that they are seeking to follow the law as the Lord has commanded.

So, with that as a background, we're going to look at the story and look at our first point, the strength of faith. So, turn with me, verses 25, and we'll read 25, 26, and 27.

Verse 25. 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.

[ 7 : 17 ] 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. Christ is just the Greek term for the Hebrew word of Messiah.

It speaks of God's anointed one. So, he was promised that he'd see the Lord's Messiah or anointed one. Verse 27. And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents, that is Mary and Joseph, brought in the child Jesus to do for him according to the custom of the law, verse 28, he took him up in his arms and blessed God.

Let us pause there before we continue on. Simeon has waited and waited and waited for the long-promised deliverance of Israel.

To say consolation is to say a deliverance or a redemption or salvation of the nation from their centuries-long exile, both in body and in soul, as promised by God.

A bit of a background to where Israel's at by the time the first century comes. They have been scattered across the known world. They have been in exile for six, seven hundred years.

[ 8 : 30 ] They have settled in faraway lands. And as is the case for all kind of geopolitical movement, they have assimilated and synchronized their customs and faith to local practices.

Often times, retaining some key aspects of the faith, but also incorporating things that were not commissioned by God in any way.

And yet, even in the land, so there's Jews scattered across the known world, but in the land of Israel, there were also Jews, Jews, although they were under Roman occupation. And likewise, they were a hodgepodge of beliefs and customs.

Many were Hellenized, which is to say they acted and spoke and participated in Greco-Roman life. Others were adherents of various sects and cults that emphasized certain parts of the Bible over others.

Some were violent. They were freedom fighters or terrorists, depending on what side of the equation you were on.

[ 9 : 42 ] Some were violent. Some were reclusive. Some had power. Some had none. But most believed that there would be a Christ or a Messiah or a chosen one that would deliver them from their enemies, whoever their enemies would be.

They differed wildly on who that Messiah would be, but certainly there would be a Messiah. I guess the too-long, didn't-read of the whole matter was Israel was a giant collection of various beliefs.

Very few followed the faith of the Scriptures. Why was this? I think in part because of the natural reality of large amounts of people moving to different regions.

But on a spiritual level, I'll suggest to you this morning that it is because the promises God made didn't come true as fast as they wanted them to.

Trusting God is hard. Having faith that endures is extremely difficult. Waiting for God to confirm and do what he says in Holy Scripture is not an easy thing.

[ 11 : 04 ] So the temptation is either to twist or reimagine God's words and promises so that they say something different, or to make them overly figurative, or even abandon Scripture altogether.

So you see, waiting is a very difficult thing, and it has been the problem with God's people time and again so that they wait, and then they wait, and then they begin to forget.

Constantly in the Scriptures, God tells them to remember, and yet so few do. If you or someone you know has gone through a deconstruction of their faith or has left their faith, I would wager that it is in part due to this relatable difficulty of trusting God when he seems absent.

And I know that it is more complex than that, but I would suggest that that aspect is included in somebody's story or journey towards deconstruction or leaving the faith completely.

And as a result, a despondency can come when God is seen as untrustworthy, when he is seen as unworthy to be the object of our praise and devotion and our faith.

[ 12 : 20 ] Waiting is hard. Waiting is hard. This is why Simeon is such a fantastic example of a faithful waiting, a faithful trust. So his age isn't given. And I kind of wrestled with this because almost all the commentaries suggest that he was a very elderly man, especially with what he was saying.

But in nowhere does it say that he was an elderly man. I'm just going to take it that he is. That there's a lot of very learned people that went before me that say he was an aged man, so he's an aged man.

So although his age isn't given, he is almost certainly elderly, and he is eagerly awaiting God's salvation. He says that he is both righteous and devout, meaning he is careful in his conduct with people, and he is reverent before the Lord.

He seems to have understood that the Lord would make good on his promise to send the Messiah and to console or redeem Israel. And more than that, he was promised to see that consolation in the Lord's Christ with his own eyes.

How does one fight against despondency, against losing one's trust in the Lord? By faithfully waiting. And here we have such a prime example to emulate.

[ 13 : 38 ] Simeon has waited well. If he is an elderly man, it suggests in the text that he has waited a very long time. He has not given in to the cults and the customs around him, nor has he abandoned the biblical faith.

Which isn't to say, what I'm not saying is that he is this perfect person, but that through the years he has maintained his faith. He has remained faithful to believing in the promises that God has spoken of in the scriptures.

But, you know, put on your skeptics hat. It could easily be said that anybody would have such a faith if they were promised to see the fruition of that faith.

It says that the Holy Spirit revealed to him that he would not die before seeing the Lord's Christ. But I want to suggest a bit of a pushback.

I've heard it said by some people that have struggled with their faith that if God would only reveal himself to me, okay, if God would only speak, then I would believe it.

[ 14 : 48 ] But I'm to believe that there is some being up there that I've never seen, I've never heard, I'm supposed to believe in this book, how am I supposed to make sense of this? Here's a bit of a pushback to that.

Simeon was an elderly man who was already walking in righteousness and devotion. The text seems to imply that he was promised that he would see the Lord's Christ later in life.

That this wasn't something that he was given from this promise when he was a little boy, but that he received this as an elderly man. The text also implies that this righteousness and devotion that he exhibited was longstanding.

That he had a faithful walk with the Lord for many decades in his life. And he was given the revelation from the Holy Spirit that he would see the Messiah precisely because he was walking in faith, not because his faith was waning or non-existent.

There's this very remarkable story later on in Luke's Gospel. Jesus himself is teaching about, he's giving a parable and it's about the rich man and Lazarus.

[16:02] And what's interesting is that out of all of Jesus' parables, which are instructive stories to communicate, especially truth about the kingdom of God, Lazarus, this poor man, is the only one who is named in any of the parables.

I'll try to sum up and be brief about this, but Jesus tells this story about this rich man who was exceedingly wealthy and this poor beggar, Lazarus.

They both die. And in the afterlife, Lazarus is in heaven. He is beside Father Abraham. And the rich man is in hell.

The fire of hell is licking at him. He is in anguish. And he thinks that he can command Lazarus, who is in heaven, to do his bidding like he could command Lazarus to do his bidding when they were on earth.

And it becomes very clear that this is not the case. The tables have turned. And right at the end, he says, if I can't be saved, then send Lazarus to visit my family and tell them from the grave to believe in God and to walk a faithful life.

[17:18] And Father Abraham, he replies like this. And this is from Luke chapter 16, verse 29. But Abraham said, they, that is the rich man's family, they have Moses and the prophets, which is to say the scriptures.

Let them hear them. But the rich man said, no, Father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent. And Abraham said to him, if they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.

I'll just say this. We are so inoculated from belief in God, okay, as a people, as human beings. We will come up with all sorts of excuses or proofs that that wasn't really what we experienced, if we had some kind of religious experience.

We are so inoculated from believing in the Lord that time and again, and this is one example, there's a few others, where even the most dramatic instance of God revealing himself would not result in a saving faith.

And I would say to you this morning that that's probably still the case. Religious or not, people will look to something metaphysical.

[18:46] And when I say metaphysical, beyond just the material world that they see, saying it to the universe or whatever kind of belief system that in a time of crisis we lean upon, say, if only I can get through this, I will believe, or universe, pay me back for all the good karma I have given.

Whatever it may be, we are constantly looking past this material world and sometimes it works. Maybe it's coincidence, okay, maybe it's not.

Sometimes it works, and yet, we continue on in cycles of unbelief. I bring this up just to say, Simeon is walking in a righteous and devout way, and because of that, he is given this promise, but he doesn't become righteous and devout because he was given a promise first.

Waiting is difficult. It is very, very hard. Having faith in God is a very, I mean, a near impossible task, and yet, this is what we are called to.

What is important to note in our text today is that Simeon was led by the Holy Spirit, which is to say that God had empowered him to act righteously and devoutly to do the things that God had called him to do.

[20:20] So, back to the text. Salvation had indeed come to the one who, with expectant faith, waited for the Lord God to do what he had promised. And, as I have said, Simeon's faith, I'm sure, was beyond, was far from being perfect, and yet, he was blessed because he chose to believe.

The result was great comfort. Not in a life free of pain, but in one so satisfied in purpose and meaning that it says that he could die a fulfilled man.

I want to say to you this morning that faith isn't so much the amount of faith we have, but the degree of, or the, not the degree of faith that we have, but the person that our faith is in.

So, what can rid a man of fear of death? How can Simeon say, I can depart in peace? What can take away the terrors of the graveyard?

What can help us see soberly and clearly so that the false promises that money and power and standing and even health will not bring us ultimate satisfaction in this life?

[21:35] How can we have clarity in that regard? It has to be nothing less than faith in God who gives His redemption, who gives His deliverance, who gives His consolation to all peoples.

This is what we see in Simeon. That this faith that he has, it buoys him up. That God strengthens him as he is walking with the Lord, as he is choosing to trust the Lord and not in other things, and

the Lord is keeping him afloat.

And this will then bring us to our next point. For having such a faith in God that brings about this consolation will ultimately also give us peace. And a peace that is so profound that life, that the life to come will be more of an exciting journey and prospect and adventure than anything else in this life.

So we'll get to our second point, the satisfaction of peace. Look with me at the Nunc Dimittis, this prayer and song of Simeon. We'll look in verse, actually we'll start in verse 27 and read down to 32. And Simeon 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, Simeon 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.

[ 23 : 11 ] 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 some ways, I imagine Simeon as that knight in the last crusade who is pale and old and has been waiting for centuries guarding the chalice.

He is weary, and yet he is delighted that his job is finished and his time has now come to an end.

Yet, these words are not those of a man who is weary from pain or frustrated with his life.

Rather, they are words of a man whose desire for genuine peace has come to fruition. Consider the peace Simeon possesses and how it is grounded not in speculation but in promise.

A peace so powerful that he is ready to die without regret. He is ready to die without fear of unsaid words or unfinished work.

[ 24 : 19 ] Can you imagine an ending more glorious than this? A peace that God himself gives, a peace that God has promised in his word that has come to pass, these promises that were made because mankind lacked peace, because it was such an elusive thing.

He may have struggled and muddled through life at certain points, but nevertheless, here he is at the end of the day and he has peace, so much peace that he is ready to depart.

Last week during our Lessons and Carol service, we read a whole number of different scripture verses, nine in total, and they were communicating to us redemption, redemptive history, and it began in Genesis 3.

I guess it would be on this side for you guys. Genesis 3, this promise that was made to Adam and Eve immediately after they sinned, after they broke covenant and relationship with God because of their selfish pride, that God would send someone to crush the serpent.

It's kind of really interesting language, but it was the first promise that God would not allow mankind to exist in this state of evil and brokenness indefinitely.

[ 25 : 43 ] that this promise throughout the Old Testament, whether explicitly or there be allusions to it, it was constant in scripture that God would make a way for peace.

No longer would we have enmity or frustration in our relationships, either with one another or between us and God. And the wonderful thing about this and what we see in Simeon's prayer is that it was according to your word, which is to say that it wasn't a contingency plan, it wasn't a plan B. This was not some kind of fix-up because God somehow didn't get the ingredients in the creation soup just right and dinner was ruined. That salvation was planned from the beginning and in the presence of all people, which is to say in the ancient world and according to the scriptures, there were the Gentiles and then there was Israel.

And here it is not saying that salvation, even though just previously it said that Simeon was waiting for the consolation of Israel, it isn't just for Israel, it is for all people. So that Gentiles, those that are not a part of the Jewish nation, the Israelite nation, they are no longer destined to walk in superstition and darkness.

And for the Jewish nation that since they have gone off course, they would be brought back home and given such an incredible honor that the Savior of the world was born through them.

[ 27 : 17 ] We sang O Holy Night and I mean capturing it incredibly in verse, the thrill of hope, the weary soul rejoices. This is exactly what we're reading about here in Simeon's song.

But the temptation will always be to consider that peace through Christ is not enough. That what he truly gives is good but not great.

That we must add something that is lacking. I one time went to, there was a Starbucks, that was like a massive frou-frou Starbucks down in the market and I had my birthday free drink so I went down there with Christine, I don't think we had any kids and I ordered, it was called a Siphon Brew Coffee

and it was like \$11 for a coffee and it took 25 minutes.

This lady was like very passionate about coffee. This is how I give back to my community. Kind of like interesting way to give back to your community that can afford \$12 coffees. Okay, the point is, the point is after all of that, okay, after all of that, I'm expecting the best coffee I've ever tasted, okay, life changing coffee and she says, do you need room for dairy?

And I think you put dairy into this, it's like putting lipstick on a pig. Like, why would we do this? Is this supposed to be the best coffee and we're going to add to it to make it better?

[ 28 : 43 ] It's supposed to be the best. And I think we do something similar, potentially, with trusting in the Lord for his peace. We have to augment it.

We have to put a bit of salt on this Michelin star dinner that is in front of us. And yet, if we do that, it is not a guarantee that we will have a higher degree of peace, but it robs God's salvation of the peace that it gives.

You cannot have Jesus plus, okay? You cannot have salvation plus, plus whatever you want to add after that. You can't have that. It's Christ and with him this divine peace or nothing at all.

Friends, let us, like Simeon, find the satisfaction that is divine and worthy of our faith. This peace that passes all understanding. And as we wrap this up, let's read the narrative that follows the Nunc Dimittis, verses 33 and 35.

It's not a part of the servant song, but it's connected and has just a deep insight that is worthy of our attention. Read with me verses 33 to 35.

[ 30 : 05 ] 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 own soul also, so that thoughts from many hearts will be revealed. He says three things here.

We're going to focus briefly on just two of them. The first is that Christ will be a divisive figure. He was a divisive figure in his day. He continues to be a divisive figure in our day.

Why? Because with the coming of Christ, God will make it very plain to the human race that we are very non-self sufficient people.

We cannot enjoy either consolation or peace that results in long-lasting satisfaction because at our core we lack a peace and consolation.

[ 31 : 11 ] So we cannot create something that we desperately need from nothing. Okay? There's a void of peace and consolation and therefore we can't produce it ourselves.

Sin and evil are so very prevalent and impossible to deal with. It will take nothing short of Christ dying in our place for our sins because we cannot atone for the wrongs we have done.

Which is to say that we cannot save ourselves. We cannot give ourselves lasting peace. And the coming of Christ has made that very, very clear. there's no amount of good that we can achieve that will tip the scales in our favor that we may enjoy a self-wrought satisfaction.

And why will this cause many to fall and rise? Well, for those that it will cause the fall, be that those that, and maybe some among us or maybe even seasons in our lives where we think that we can actually exist and live completely satisfied, like a deep, like core, heart of heart satisfaction apart from Jesus.

Okay? That is what the scripture will call delusion. And if you've tried that and have come up short, you can say actually it is a bit of a delusional thought.

[ 32 : 31 ] But for those that can recognize that they are in deep need of a savior, what Christ extends is mercy and joy and love and an eternal satisfaction that will transcend this world, that will be rooted in an unchanging God and therefore will never change.

And it's offered to us as a free gift of grace. The second point that he makes is related to the first, but it speaks to Christ being both God and judge.

Notice at the very end, Simeon says that Christ will cause the thoughts from many hearts to be revealed. Throughout the New Testament, there are 13 uses of this word translated here as thoughts, and in every instance, it comes with a negative constant, it is pejorative, it's negative. These thoughts are bad thoughts, these thoughts are vain thoughts, these thoughts are doubting thoughts, these are thoughts all of which are hostile to God and his purposes. It is really the condition of one's heart that our thoughts are then reflecting.

Therefore, when Simeon says that the thoughts from many hearts will be revealed, he means that the coming of Christ will show how utterly broken and sinful and deceived the human heart truly is. [ 33 : 58 ] And on one hand, the life of Christ will be so utterly and completely perfect that all of existence will see this life as the ultimate exemplar and therefore the standard of goodness and of kindness and love so that even people outside of the Christian faith can talk about Jesus and often wonder why his followers don't look like him.

But it will also mean that no human soul can hide their wickedness from his just judgment. Simeon is saying that Christ sees all.

God sees all. And he knows all. And he is the only one who will perfectly judge all who ever lived. And all who ever lived will be judged. It's a terrifying thought, okay?

It's a terrifying thought. But maybe not so terrifying if we consider this incredible scene once again. For what we see is Simeon, this elderly man, at the end of his life, holding this tender, helpless baby in his arms.

And yet that child was the creator, is the creator of all things. The one who actually is holding Simeon and holding us this morning.

[ 35 : 17 ] That in the incarnation, God literally became a human being, took on flesh, that God became enfleshed.

And it is nothing short of God knowing our sinful estate and our utter helplessness becoming himself helpless. And although he knew no sin, became sin for us so that, what 1 Corinthians tells us, that we might become the righteousness of God.

I'll end with this. God loves you. He loves you.

He loves you, and he loves you in such a way that he is willing to go to great length so that you will be with him. And yet, he does so knowing all of your junk, all of your history, all of the things that you would blush to confess.

He knows it all, and he loves you. His great desire is to console you with an everlasting consolation, to give you peace and satisfaction to such a degree that this life, although it is wonderful and good and worthy to be enjoyed, it will pale in comparison to the life to come, the satisfaction and peace that he will give.

[ 36 : 52 ] For he will give you himself. The eternal God has welcomed us into his very presence if we are but to trust in him. Again, not a perfect trust, but put our faith in Christ himself to remind ourselves and believe that no achievement that we could do can bring us such satisfaction, that there's no amount of good living we can do that will bring us a consolation that will even hold a candle to what God is offering us to us in Jesus Christ.

So I think what Simeon is telling us to do this morning with his life is to trust in Christ and like Simeon to enjoy a holy satisfaction, a deep, deep trust that we may know the Prince of Peace all the days of our life.

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