

The Happiest Man on Earth (1)

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 20 December 2015

Preacher: Rev. James Maciver

[0 : 0 0] Let's turn together this morning for a short time to Luke chapter 2 beginning at verse 25. Luke chapter 2 at 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.

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. We're going to look at this passage today, this morning and then this evening, verses 27 through to verse 30.

And as you see, through to verse 35 rather. It's about Simeon, of course, this famous incident where Simeon, who's generally thought of as being an old man, but we don't have any evidence that he was all that old.

It appears that he was certainly up in years. He'd been waiting certainly for some time for this moment for him to actually see the Lord's Christ or the Messiah for himself.

[1 : 1 6] And he'd had this promise from God that he would not actually die until he had seen the Lord's Christ for himself. And that's why he speaks in this passage as he does, in this beautiful statement that he made, which we'll come back to look at this evening, where in verses 29 to 32, he made a statement about himself and about this Jesus, this infant Jesus that he held in his arms.

Now, the Royal Children, as you know, have been in the news recently. Whenever there's any development, of course, regarding Royal Children, you usually find it somewhere in the headlines in the news reports.

And it was the same in this coming week or so, where the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge announced that a certain nursery would actually be the nursery to which the children would be taken.

That made the headlines, of course, and that always is the case. But the birth of Jesus made no headlines. The Son of God came into the world and there were no news reports about him.

But he is the news. He is the great news. As he came into the world, he came into the world quietly and hardly noticed and not noticed by the most of the people in the world.

[2 : 3 7] And yet he came as God's good news to sinners. You shall call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins.

There was no other, nor will there be any other birth like it. Now, Jesus, at this point, is over a month old. The regulations, going back to the Old Testament, of course, in the likes of Leviticus chapter 12, required that a mother would ceremonially be unclean after giving birth.

So there was, first of all, a waiting for a week before the child was then circumcised on the eighth day. And then they had to wait for another 33 days for that period of, for that time of ceremonial uncleanness to be over before they could go and take part in anything that was regarded as spiritual or holy work, work in the temple or coming as she is now with the child to be presented to the Lord.

So, at this stage, Jesus is over a month old, something like 40 days or thereabouts. In any case, he has come here with his mother and Joseph to be presented to the Lord, according to the law of the Lord, to be called, to be presented as specifically the Lord.

Now, that itself should make us pause, because here is the Son of God. And he's being presented after he's been born in our nature.

[4 : 19] He's taken our human nature to himself. In doing that, he's come to be developed in the womb of his mother and then born just like you and I are born into the world. There is the Son of God and he's coming to be presented to God.

What does that mean? It means that, as was the case with these firstborn sons, they were presented to the Lord as God had required all the way through the Old Testament. They were specifically his.

They were presented to the Lord, more or less saying, by presenting them to the Lord, Lord, this child is yours. She belongs to you. And the wonder of it is that this is God himself.

Present his Son in our nature, being presented to himself as one who is really his servant, one who belongs to him, one who has a mission that will please God, that will in fact be as God himself appointed.

And at all times when you come across these kinds of details, we should pause and wonder at the fact that this is in fact the Son of God.

[5 : 26] This is God in our nature, God in the flesh. And God in the flesh undergoing these processes, these rituals that were necessary for human beings.

And it shows you how completely and how wonderfully Jesus actually came into our conditions, into our setting, if you like, and identified himself completely with us in our situation, in our situation as sinners, in our situation as needy people, that he completely identified with us.

And after all, as he went on later on to be baptized, he didn't need to be baptized, strictly speaking, for he had no sin of his own. It wasn't because he was a sinner that he was baptized.

And that's why John the Baptist objected when it came to Christ being presented for baptism. John said to him, Lord, I have a need to be baptized of you. And Jesus said, Let it be like this for now.

For in this way, it becomes us to fulfill all righteousness. He didn't require to be baptized because of any sin of his own.

[6 : 37] He required to be baptized because in that way he was showing that he was coming fully into the situation of those sinners that he had come to save. He wasn't leaving out any aspect of their circumstances.

He was coming to fully identify with them. And here he is as well, being presented in the temple by his mother and by Joseph. Fully identifying with sinners as they are required to be presented to the Lord as his property belonging to him.

And it's there that he meets Simeon, that Simeon met them with the child Jesus. And I've called the title of our studies today The Happiest Man on Earth.

And the reason for that is as you look at that moment that's expressed in, where it's expressed in these verses, surely that's the case. Where would you find anywhere on earth at that specific moment a happier man than Simeon?

A more fulfilled man than Simeon with the child Jesus in his arms as he took him up and said, Lord, now you're letting your seven depart in peace for my eyes are seeing your salvation.

[7 : 55] This man is ecstatic. This man has waited a long time for this moment. And at that time, in this instance, he is the happiest man on earth because he has the infant saviour in his arms.

And he knows what this child means. Let's look at four things about him. Two this morning and we'll leave the other two for this evening. First of all, Simeon's personal character because that's important.

And then secondly, Simeon's patient expectancy. That's taking us into verses 25 and 26. Here was a man whose personal character is emphasised in a very short statement.

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.

That's not a very long biography, is it? There's not much detail there but there's a whole lot packed into these two words of his personal character. He was a righteous man and he was a devout man.

[9 : 04] And that fits into the picture of Simeon and what he's saying about the Lord. This wasn't a man who just at this moment began to think about things seriously.

He began to think about this child and what he meant. He had been thinking about this for years. He had been preparing about for this for years. He was a man who had lived in close fellowship with God.

He was a righteous man, it says first of all. And as you know yourselves, the word righteous is always used in the Bible to do with a certain standard of life, a certain standard of life that meets the standard of God himself.

A righteous person is somebody who meets the standard that God requires of us in our life. Not just inwardly, not just in our hearts, not just in our souls, not just in our relationship with God, but in the entirety of life.

Righteousness is not just something that includes your relationship with God in a private sense. Righteousness is something that extends into your relationship with other people, that extends into how you go about doing things in your life, how you go about things in the world with people that you have contact with.

[10 : 13] Righteousness is practical as well as inward and spiritual. This was a righteous man. He wasn't a righteous man in a legalistic, self-produced kind of righteousness.

This is not talking about somebody who had actually produced a kind of standard of life by a legalistic observance of certain laws and rules and regulations by which he then would be regarded by human beings as righteous.

Righteousness, remember, is always to do with the approval of God. Where a person is righteous, then he's righteous as far as God is concerned.

Yes? Seen by human beings. It's seen by others as a certain type of life. But not everybody who sees a righteous man says, that's really a good man, that's a righteous man, that's the kind of life I would like to live.

Many people don't like it. Many people are offended by it. Many people find objection with it. Righteous means living the life that God requires and has God's approval.

[11 : 23] and you don't come into that by self-achievement, by creating that sort of status for yourself where God is obliged to accept you as righteous. Righteousness is not something you produce, it's something you receive.

You receive Christ and you receive His righteousness. And as you receive His righteousness, as you receive the approval of God in relation to that, so God regards you as righteous.

this man was a righteous man. In all his dealings with other people, in his relationship with God, he was righteous. He matched up to God's standard.

He wasn't a perfect man, of course not. Nobody, apart from Jesus Himself, was perfect. But he is described as a righteous man.

man. And he was also a devout man. The word devout literally means something well held, something that's held onto and grasped properly.

[12 : 34] And although it's dangerous sometimes just to open up words in terms of the literal meaning, meaning, it is sometimes useful to see the actual literal meaning of a word in scripture where you find it applied like this to a person such as Simeon.

This man was devout. He was a man who held well to things. In other words, he was a man who was careful about how he lived his life.

He was careful about the law of God and how he related to the law of God. He was careful about the promises of God, how he held to the promises of God. He was careful and circumspect in the way in which he lived his life outwardly and inwardly.

He was a devout man, and this word devout is especially to do with his relationship with God, where righteous is including both. Devout is especially something that takes account of his relationship with God.

He walked with God, in other words, he was a holy man. He was a man who lived in fellowship and in communion with God. you could say that this word devout, this idea of holding on to something well or carefully means that for Simeon, being a Christian, being a righteous man, being a holy man, being a godly man, included the fine print of God's revelation.

[13 : 57] It wasn't just a matter of him being careful to do the big things and not really worried about the smaller details. If you think of what God had given in terms of his law, his regulations, the things that God had given as to what human life should consist of, what he required of people, well, Simeon was careful to take hold and to keep hold of the small print and the finer details as well as all the big things.

It was the very opposite of the Pharisees. The Pharisees, and indeed you find that in Luke chapter 18 there, the Pharisee and the publican, the Pharisee who went to the temple with the publican, like his fellow Pharisees, he thought to himself that he was righteous.

And he looked to the opinion of human people to actually reinforce the idea that he was a righteous man. Whereas Simeon wasn't basing assurance of being a righteous man on what people thought of him.

Not that that was unimportant. For Simeon, the assurance of being a righteous man was all about what God thought of him. What it was between himself and God.

And what he was doing was what God had given him by way of this knowledge of himself. And that really reminds us of how important it is as we relate to Christ, as we come hopefully ourselves to see this Jesus as the one in whom God has deposited life for us.

[15 : 38] The salvation of God. Here is a reminder to us that that's never detached from holiness of life. From carefulness of life.

Not from a sort of legalistic approach to life where you do certain things and that makes you a Christian. That's not what makes you a Christian. Whether it's things that are of the nature of going to take communion, going to the Lord's table, being baptized, going to prayer meetings, all of these sort of things are so important.

But we mustn't think that now that I've done that I am a Christian. Now that I've done that, that makes me a Christian. What makes you a Christian is being born again.

being born of the Spirit of God. Being brought into a relationship with God where God says, now you're righteous because you have the righteousness of Jesus, my son.

And you live in relation with him. In a living relationship with him. So Simeon's personal character is important for us. We mustn't pass over these words and just because verses 29 to 32 are so beautiful and so packed full of wonderful joy and of expressiveness.

[17 : 04] We mustn't be in so much of a rush going over them that we just miss out these great points that are made about this man's character. He was what he was in his expression of what he made of Jesus because he was a righteous man and because he was a devout man.

As he lived in expectancy of seeing the Lord's Christ. As he lived with the promise of God that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Christ. It didn't make him less righteous.

It didn't make him less careful. It was all the more for Simeon a matter of living in a holy and devout life in relationship with God.

Secondly, there's Simeon's patient expectancy. 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.

Now that word waiting first of all, it's used elsewhere in the Bible in a similar way. Chapter 12, if you flick forward to chapter 12, you'll see it there at verse 36 where Jesus there is speaking about his own return and where he's speaking about that return of his own return being at an hour that you do not expect.

[18 : 30] He's saying here, stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast.

And if you go to Paul's letter, just one example of that, you'll find it in Titus chapter 2 verse 13 which again talks about the salvation that has come from God, where God has brought this salvation to us in the person of this Jesus.

But he's saying we are presently waiting for the blessed hope and the appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ. That's what he's saying, waiting for that blessed hope, waiting for our hope to be realized, to be fulfilled at the coming of Christ.

What he's really saying is that this waiting is something that has at the very substance of it, at the very core of you, if you like, the idea of expectation.

Because you see, Simeon was living by the promises of God. And you and I as Christians have to live by the promises of God. You could say that in many respects, the very substance of what God has given us in the gospel are all to do with promises.

[19 : 52] Promises, some of which have been fulfilled in the coming of Christ, in the death of Christ, in the resurrection of Christ, the exaltation of Christ, and yet there are still many promises that are being fulfilled every single day on the part of all of us who believe we have everyday promises.

They are for everyday use. Promises for God looking after us, for God guiding us, promises for God's protective care, promises in relation to the things that you need for everyday use, for everyday life.

And the promise, of course, of the coming of Christ, the promise of eternal life in its fullness, the promises in regard to things that are yet to be fulfilled. Life is about receiving promises from God.

That's the Christian life. It's about these promises from God. That's how Simeon lived. He had these promises from God that the Messiah was coming. And he had the specific promise from God that he would not die until he had seen that Messiah for himself.

And he lived by those promises. He was waiting for their fulfillment. He waited and lived in expectation.

[21 : 04] salvation. Is that how it is with myself and with yourself? Do we live everyday conscious that God is true to his promises?

Do we set out everyday to claim the promises of God for ourselves? Do we approach him everyday that we live as our father in heaven who holds out these promises and says, my child, these promises are for you.

The promise that I will be a God to you and you shall be my child. The promise that I will be a father to you and I will be the one who looks after you. The promise that whatever things happen in your life, in your experience, in your circumstances, it's not going to interfere in any way with the whole that I have of you.

For I will not leave you and I will not forsake you and I will be faithful to my covenant. Do we live by these promises? Are they sure in our hearts today? Or are we easily deflected from them?

Do we find the things of this life sometimes to trouble us so much and sometimes to take over our minds so much? Are our worries, as Jesus put it in the great sermon on the mount, where the things of today, the things that cause anxiety, those things that we are so familiar with, do they actually cloud our minds to the certainty of God's promises?

[22 : 35] Fear not, said Jesus, little flock, for it is your father's good purpose to give you the kingdom. The promises of God are basic to our Christian life and as Simeon did, so we must too.

We have to wait upon God. We have to wait with expectancy that God will indeed fulfill his promises. And then there's the consolation.

This is what he was waiting for. This is what he was expecting. This is what he had a sense of expectancy over. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel.

What is that? What's the consolation of Israel? The word consolation, as you know, has to do with comfort, has to do with bringing a sense of assurance or rest to us. And the consolation of Israel is really a beautiful name in that context for the Lord Jesus himself.

This is what Simeon was waiting for. He was waiting for a person who would be the consolation of Israel because Simeon knew that Israel's consolation, that the comfort for God's people that he had promised right through from Isaiah and before then, comfort ye, comfort my people, that that was going to be fulfilled in the person of the Messiah.

[24 : 02] And Simeon was waiting for the consolation of Israel. And that's a wonderful name for Jesus. You remember when in the world of Noah's day, or just before Noah was born, how the Bible talks about how desperately wicked and ungodly the world was.

And all the way from the third chapter of Genesis, you find a world that has come under the curse of God due to human sinfulness.

And how you find in chapter six onwards the account of Noah and the flood. And incidentally, Noah is a wonderful example of a righteous man. In the midst of all that depravity, in the midst of all that ungodliness, Noah is singled out by God and God says to him, you have seen righteous in this generation.

But that's just by the way, when you find in chapter five the list of the ancestry of Noah, you'll find that his father Lamech, there was another Lamech in the line of Cain, who was a very different character, very arrogant and godly man.

But this Lamech, who was on the line of Shem, he had lived 182 years and fathered a son.

[25 : 31] And he called his name Noah, saying, out of the ground that the Lord has cursed, this one shall bring us relief from the work and the painful toil of our hands.

this Lamech made that declaration about Noah. Noah is a Hebrew word that really means consolation, it means comfort or rest.

And that's the description, that's the announcement that Lamech, Noah's father, made. Lamech, who was of that particular line from Abel, rather, not Shem, as I mentioned earlier.

But that line that came as the believing line, this is the announcement he made. It was in regard to God bringing comfort in relation to this curse that the Lord had brought upon the world, upon the earth, due to sin.

The same shall bring us, this child shall bring us relief. In other words, there you find a way, way back there in the mists of time, an announcement that anticipates the coming of a person who was going to be the great peace giver, the one who would lift the curse of sin from the world that God had actually afflicted with this curse in the aftermath of sin.

[27 : 02] sin. And you know, it sounds naive to say it, but it is true. There is no comfort, there is no peace, no lasting peace, no true peace for the world without Jesus at the heart of it.

It doesn't matter how much politicians may seriously and meaningfully try to bring about peace, and it doesn't matter what sort of efforts are made to bring about peace between nations.

We are not decrying their efforts, but the problem is that God is not in it, and especially that Christ is not in it, and it is not based upon this manifesto of the gospel itself.

People will say to us today, well, you are just completely out of touch with reality to suggest that peace can exist between nations on the basis of this person who is called Jesus Christ.

Why not? If every nation on earth lived by the standards of Jesus and in obedience to Jesus, there would be no war.

[28 : 12] There would be no dissension and strife and hatred between nations. And what it is for individuals, so it is for nations and for people and for societies as well.

Our own nation is no less in need of that peace. and the words of Matthew 11 verses 28 following are as much for groups, for nations, for peoples as they are for individuals.

You know what these words are? Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. I will be your Noah.

I will be your consolation. Take my yoke upon you. Take my standard upon you, and you will find rest for your souls.

For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. What he meant by that was not that it was easy to live in obedience as a Christian. What he meant was compared to what human beings impose upon people in subjection to them.

[29 : 23] the Lord Jesus Christ reign is one of consolation and of peace and of happiness. The curse is lifted and is only lifted in Jesus Christ.

There is no other place or person where you will find it lifted. And it is no accident at all that in the course of history the more you find God and Christ and the gospel put out of people's lives by dictators whoever they might have been or by people themselves in their choice the less you will find of peace and of contentment and of consolation.

It doesn't work if Christ is not the heart of it. If he is then he is the consolation for us. And it is the same for your life and mine.

We need peace. We need stability. We need consolation. We need our lives to have that level of comfort and assurance in them that whatever happens in this life all will be well with us.

That sense of well being. Where do you find it? You find it in a person. You find it in this person Jesus. As Simeon takes him up in his arms he says now Lord you're letting your seven depart in peace because this is my peace.

[30 : 49] This is my consolation. I've been waiting for the consolation of Israel and now I have the consolation of Israel in my arms. I can carry him but he is the one as he must be for you as well in the arms of your faith in the arms of your love in the arms of your obedience to him.

So he becomes your consolation. And the final thing about his patient expectancy. He was waiting and he was waiting for the consolation of Israel but the Holy Spirit was upon him.

That really was in many ways the key to his life and it still is. It's what makes all the difference to have the Holy Spirit in one's life to be led by the Spirit to be governed by the Spirit because we are either one or the other as Paul says in Romans we are either flesh or spirit.

We have the mind of the flesh or the mind of the Spirit. And the mind of the flesh is enmity against God. It is not subject to the law of God. Neither indeed can be.

Why? Because flesh is enmity against God. It's fallen sinful human nature. It's the mind that lies under the curse of sin. And that is lifted when Jesus enters into your life.

[32 : 07] Because the spiritual mind, the mind of the Spirit, is life and peace. Peace. That's what made all the difference.

And that's what will make the difference in your life and mine. What is it essentially that distinguishes what a Christian is from everybody else?

It's the fact that the Holy Spirit occupies that person's life. The Holy Spirit lives in that person.

That's the big difference. And today you and I can have no greater concern or prayer than that God's Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit, this third person of the Godhead, would be in us as well.

That we would have our own lives, our very persons as the house the Holy Spirit lives in. Personally, a temple for the Spirit.

[33 : 15] And that's the force of this word now that you find there in verse 29. We'll come back to it more fully this evening. When he took up the infant Jesus in his arms, he blessed God and said, Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace.

It's a very small word, but it's a very important word, this word now. He's gone from what was to what now is. He's gone from the man who was waiting for something all his life or most of his life to the person who is now seeing what he was waiting for all of these years.

Is there a now of that type in your own life and in mine? where you can say clearly, where you can see clearly a distinction between what was and what is now the case.

Where you can say about this Jesus and having this Jesus for yourself, Lord, now you're letting your servant depart in peace.

Now I have peace. Now everything is right. Now everything is as it should be. Because now I have Jesus.

[34 : 33] Because now I hold him. Because now he is my savior. Let's pray. Our gracious God, again we thank you for this wondrous provision that you have made for us.

And for the way that you have brought about in the experience of your people such a fulfillment of your promise that you would indeed send a savior and you would send him in a way that would conquer sin and bring about the abolishing of death.

Lord, we thank you that in the person of your son we have such a great conqueror and we have one who is able fully to meet all our needs and to guide us safely through life and into eternal life with you above.

Hear us now we pray for his name's sake. Amen.