

Encounters With Jesus(11) - Simeon, The Happiest Man On Earth(2)

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Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[0 : 01] 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.

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 revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.

And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. And Simeon blessed him 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 may be revealed.

Now we looked last time at verses 25 and 26 where we saw something there of the character of this man, Simeon, focusing our attention on the words righteous and devout, and how he was waiting for this particular event that the Lord had promised.

[1 : 26] He had promised that he would not see death, that he would not die until he had seen for himself the Messiah, the Lord's Christ, as it's put here, the Lord's anointed. And when they brought the child, Mary and Joseph, to the temple in accordance with the custom of the time, he came in the spirit, we read there in verse 27, and when the parents brought in the child, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace.

So having looked at what he was like, I would like to look tonight at something of what he said as he took up the infant Jesus in his arms and spoke these wonderful words about that particular occasion that he was marking by taking Jesus up and uttering these words over him.

Look, first of all, at Simeon's pronouncement. That's what we're mainly looking at this evening, Simeon's pronouncement, but he also has what we can call a prophecy, Simeon's prophecy, where he says, Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.

He was pointing to the future and what the future would be in relation to this child, to Jesus, so that in a sense he is saying this really is, this child is the one that the destiny of human beings revolves around.

Look, first of all, at his pronouncement in verses 28 to 32. Now he says, Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace.

[3 : 12] And of course, that word now is emphasized. Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace. He had been waiting for this now for all of his lifetime.

From the moment that the Lord revealed to him that he would not die till he had seen the Messiah, this is what he was living for. This is what he was looking forward to. This is what his heart was set upon, seeing Jesus, seeing the Messiah for himself.

And now that moment came. This is how he puts it. Lord, now. And that word now shows us just what a critical moment this is. Not only in Simeon's experience as a person, but in the world's history.

Because that now is really packed with fulfillment. That word now is full of theological significance. Because here is God fulfilling his promise.

Over all of the centuries before this, from the moment that he said that the seed of the woman would come. This was way back in Eden, you remember? Just after man's fall. And that that seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent of Satan.

[4 : 19] This is the fulfillment or the incarnation of the Son of God, taking our human nature to fulfill that promise from God. And Simeon knows it.

And Simeon has his own desire here met in the person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Now you are letting your servant depart in peace.

And when he says depart, it's an interesting word. It's a word that he uses along with the word servant. Because a servant, as the servant in those days was under the employ of a master, someone who owned them very often if they were slaves.

Now Simeon is really looking at himself as a man of God, having served God, having been under the mastery of God, having been under the ownership of God as a believer, and in this life, living until he had seen this for himself.

Now he's saying, Lord, now you're letting your servant depart. My time of serving you in this world is coming to an end. My service has reached its conclusion.

[5 : 31] And now I can go. Now you're letting me depart in peace. It's not that his service was tedious. It's not that he found it a drag serving the Lord.

But it fits in with other teachings in the New Testament about serving the Lord. You remember Paul, for example, when he wrote his second letter to Timothy.

And he was very conscious, of course, that his own life was approaching the end as far as he could see it. And he summarized his life and his service for the Lord in such a way that he said, Now the time of my departure is at hand.

It's the same idea that you have in Simeon here. The time of his service in this world for God was at an end. He knew that this was going to be a whole new chapter beginning for Simeon when he now left this world shortly after this event, whenever it would be, his time in this world was coming to an end.

Isn't that how we see our time in this world, you and I, tonight? Do we regard our time in this world as characterized chiefly by serving God?

[6 : 45] Will our leaving of this world be, in the words of Simeon, a departure, a blessed release? Not that we find it tedious or difficult in the sense of unacceptable to serve the Lord, but Simeon was longing for this release.

He was longing for a better place. He was longing for a better world. He was longing not only to see the Lord's Messiah, but then immediately after that to go to be with the Lord forever.

What is our view of this life? What is our view of the span of the years of this life? Maybe short or long, doesn't matter, but are they characterized chiefly by being servants of God?

Is your great delight in obedience to Christ? Is your great delight in knowing that you are a servant of Christ? Well, that's what Simeon was, and here he is saying, he is now content to leave this world, because he has seen the fulfillment of God's promise towards him.

That's why he is saying here, now you are letting your servant depart in peace. And what a great sentiment that is too. Sometimes we come to the end of our journey in this world, outwardly at least, and there may be little peace.

[8 : 05] We may be in pain, we might have all kinds of circumstances that cause us perplexity, and yet that inward peace of the Lord may still mark our departure from this life.

We hope it will be so. For Simeon it was so. He was departing in peace. He was departing with his heart's delight. He was the happiest man in the world at that stage.

And isn't it an amazing thing in itself, that here's a man who knows he's about to die. He knows that the end of his life is in sight. He knows that now that God has fulfilled this great promise that he would see the Lord's Messiah, that's it for him in this life.

And yet he's saying, not only Lord are you letting me depart, you're letting me depart in peace. My heart is filled with peace at this stage of my life.

Surely that's how you and I would want to be as well. Whatever our outward circumstances, and in terms of our physical condition, we would certainly know the Lord's peace in our hearts, surely, as that which would mark our departure from this world.

[9 : 18] And in Christ, that's what the Lord has provided for all who trust in him. Whatever things they go through in this life, however difficult this life may have been for them, whatever struggles they might have had, whatever failures they might have been conscious of in the course of their life, however many times they may look back and know they have failed.

For those in Christ, it's still peace, and it always will be, and it will be a departure in peace and into peace, into what Hebrews calls a better country.

Well, he says, this is what it is. And why is it that he is able to depart in peace? Well, he says, because for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples.

This is the reason that he's saying, Lord, now you're letting yourself depart in peace, because what I have in my arms, is really what he means, is your salvation. How remarkable is that?

We all know what it's like, especially for grandparents, when a newly born grandchild is placed in our arms.

[10 : 37] We know what that's like. We know the gush of joy and satisfaction that that brings to us. But this is no ordinary child. This is God.

This is the Son of God. This is the divine person, the Son of God, the second person of the glorious Trinity that God is. And he has taken human nature to himself, but Simeon is holding in his hands not merely a human nature, it's the Lord in his human nature.

It's the Lord having become man. And you know, all the way through Luke's Gospel, regularly you find Luke expressing how people were amazed.

And you find it here as well, in verse 33, his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. And at strategic places through the Gospel of Luke, you find this word marveled, sometimes translated amazed.

Different people are amazed at the works that Jesus is doing, at the miracles that Jesus is performing, at the words that Jesus is speaking. Are we amazed?

[11 : 50] Have we been caught up with a sense of wonder in the incarnation of the Son of God? Is it tonight for us the wonder of wonders that God became man, that God took humanity to himself, that the Son of God being born as Jesus Christ appeared in the arms of Simeon?

Simeon could say, as he was leading this life, I'm holding the Son of God in his human nature. That, by any stretch of the imagination, is an amazing thing.

And that's how it was. That's how it should be for you and for me too. That to save us from our sins, no less a thing happened than God became man.

The Son of God took on infancy and development in his human nature from then on, so that he would have the means by which ultimately he came to die the death of the cross.

There is no greater amazing, there is no greater, more amazing thing than that. Whatever things amaze us in this life, we use the word very often, and that's amazing.

[13 : 16] Something that's happened in the world, something that you see by way of human inventions, and you say over it, and very rightly, that's amazing. But it's tiny, it's nothing compared to God in the arms of Simeon.

As a human being, the Son of God carried in his arms. He took him up in his arms and he said, Lord, my eyes have seen your salvation.

You see, salvation is not about, I don't want to be misunderstood, but it's not about keeping a set of rules. It's not about having laws that you then just conform to, and that makes you a Christian.

Yes, God has given us certain rules, certain regulations. He's given us the moral laws, a code of life, and it's something that, of course, we relate to as we look at our own behavior.

But it's not keeping the law that makes us Christians. It's not keeping the law that makes us righteous, as Paul found out. It's having our trust in Christ.

[14 : 26] It's being in Christ. It's, as you like, it's taking up Jesus into your arms and saying, this is the Savior that I want myself to hold and to have and to be mine.

That's what Simeon is looking at with his eyes as he looks at that infant child. Look at what he's saying. For my eyes have seen that or are seeing your salvation.

God's salvation of sinners. It's in this person. And you have this person in your life and you are saved. And if you don't have him in your life, you're not.

The equation works both ways. You see, wonderfully here, I think it's very interesting the way he says that earlier on in the chapter as we read, it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

And Luke didn't just write that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. He used the word seen both times. It had been revealed to him he would not see death until he had seen the Lord's Christ.

[15 : 39] And what a difference it made to Simeon coming to see death, having first of all seen Jesus before that. When you and I come to see death and you can see death as you find it described in the scriptures, as you know from your own experience that that's the end that's in store for us all in this life.

Death is going to end our journey in this life. You are seeing death from that point of view now. But what a difference it makes seeing death through first of all seeing Jesus.

Seeing Jesus for yourself. Seeing him as your salvation. seeing him as the one in whom God is pleased with you. Seeing him before you come to see death or death comes to you makes all the difference not just all the difference in the world but all the difference in eternity.

But that's what Simeon where Simeon is now at with his life. It had been revealed to him and now he's saying my eyes have seen your salvation.

how do you view Jesus tonight? You're well used to his name. All of us have been for many years those of us who are well on in our journey through life.

[17 : 02] Children tonight how do you see Jesus? What thoughts do you have in your mind as you find Jesus described in the Bible? how do you see him as you read about him?

How do you see him in relation to your own young life? Don't say whatever you say that you're too young for him or too young for him to be interested in you or for you to be interested in him.

You can have Simeon's words used at any time in life in any age group whatever age group we belong to and the youngest person in here tonight can say and we hope would be able to say for themselves Lord I'm now seeing your salvation I see Jesus I know Jesus and therefore that's my salvation.

Don't you listen to any other kind of teaching that suggests to you that you can be saved in any other way but the way God himself says is opened by him in Jesus Christ for us.

He is the way the truth and the life and as we come to God in him we have salvation in him and it becomes ours and that's what he's saying this is your salvation that I have seen which you he says have prepared in the presence of all peoples a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.

[18 : 35] Simeon is making it clear there that this savior this salvation has come not just for the benefit of the people of Israel for the Jewish people there at the time or afterwards.

He says here you have prepared this in the presence of all peoples Jew and Gentile whatever our background is this preparation of God has us in view it's for our like it's for us and who we are and what we're like and you see he's saying prepared it God has prepared he's saying to God that you have prepared this God has done this God has initiated this this is not a human invention you know many people today will say to you that the Bible is just nothing more than people's ideas of perhaps what reasons they could give for some thoughts in their minds about death about eternity whether there's life after death what sort of life we should live in this world and all the way through the centuries the thing accumulated and you know that idea is it's hardly something we really find difficult even in saying that people have just invented

God as a kind of crutch and a kind of support for themselves for the tough times in life this Bible is not human ideas about God this is God's revelation to human beings and this revelation that God has given us in his word in the entirety of this word is a word that teaches us as in this passage that God has prepared this salvation he has prepared it he has created it he has devised it his wisdom has actually prepared this salvation in Christ in other words you will never get a better one Spurgeon was one of the great preachers of the church whatever age you might look at Spurgeon would rank among the great preachers that could fit into the great preacher of any time and he once said to his congregation or to those he was preaching to at one time you will find very likely much much better preaching but you will never find a better gospel you will never find a better salvation or any other than you have here in what

God has devised in what God has created in what God is now saying I have prepared this for you know what it's like when somebody prepares something for you whether it's a meal or something else that's given you as a gift and they've gone to great length to procure it for you to either buy it or put it together and it's nicely wrapped or nicely presented well even more so is it the case with God's salvation God has gone to the lengths of preparing it in every possible detail imaginable so that we're nothing but the best nothing but what suits our exact situation as lost sinner he has prepared the salvation Simeon is saying now I'm letting you're letting yourself depart in peace according to your word as you have promised for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared that's why it really is such a serious thing such a slight of God's kindness we can say respectfully such a slap in the face when God has gone to the lengths of preparing such a salvation as is in Jesus how can anyone refuse that how can we possibly say no to that how can we turn that away from ourselves how can we say we're not ready yet for that when it's ready for us how can we say we're not prepared to receive it when it has been prepared in every exact detail to meet our needs friends tonight this gospel that we're attempting to preach week after week is a gospel in which the preparation of God in regard to our salvation is so wonderfully set before us in the person of Jesus

Christ as you look at Jesus Christ as Simeon was looking down at that perfect infant child you could see in that perfection the perfection of God's preparation as you look at the Bible's description of Jesus what he was like what he is like what he did what he said everything about him in his life in his death in his resurrection in his ascension to glory in his person in his behavior every single thing about him is perfection and God is saying that perfection is what I have prepared for you for you and for me who could not have complained if God had said I'm done with you I'm not going to prepare salvation for you for you sinners what you've done against me what you've done to my honor to my glory and despising my commandment turning to your own ways but no that's not our God that's not what he's like tonight he's saying to me and to you despite what

[24 : 57] I know you are I have prepared this salvation for you in my son Jesus Christ and it's for the presence before he's saying here it's prepared it in the present or before all people the old authorized version is good here actually it's really before the face off and that always really brings an immediacy doesn't it when you say it's before the face of someone it's in your immediate presence and that's really what the gospel is that's what Simeon is saying as he looks down at Jesus in his arms what he's saying is Lord this is your salvation my eyes have now seen it and you have prepared it in my immediate presence and in the presence just there in the sight of there before the face of all peoples whatever complaints we may have tonight with regard to

God the one complaint we cannot have is that God has not brought his salvation near to us that he has not made it clear to us that he has not unveiled it for us in every single detail we need to know in the person of Jesus Christ and that's really again what you find in these words where Simeon is saying in the presence of all peoples if people in the world tonight and our nation particularly where the gospel is so available to people if they would want it nobody can say with any justification well why hasn't God actually come near to me why hasn't God made things clear to me why is such and such still an unknown quantity in regard to God every single thing that we need to know for salvation is clear in the

Bible not everything is clear in the Bible there are great mysteries to God's being to God's dealings with us to God's providence sadly so many people find fault with God over these mysteries and they do find acceptance for the things he has made clear it is before the face of all peoples right in front of your face and my face tonight is salvation it's that near to you God has brought it near to you God is holding it up to your face God is saying this is not distant from you this is not in that sense a mystery to you I'm explaining it to you he's saying right before your eyes that's why it's so important that we accept the salvation that's in

Christ because the one thing we will never be able to argue if we leave this world unsaved and God forbid that I or any of you should be like that the one thing you will not be able to say is Lord you didn't make clear to me how I should be saved he has prepared it and done so in the sight of in the presence of all peoples where the gospel is Christ is near God is close and is for you and for me a wonderful wonderful provision and preparation and then he says a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel and Jesus is bringing about both he's uniting Jew and Gentile together in this one salvation and he's both a light for revelation to the

Gentiles where there was darkness as Matthew's gospel and quoting again from the Old Testament those that dwelt in darkness have seen a great light light has come into the world in Jesus Christ the darkness of sin and of death has been dispelled by the light of the glory of Christ in his work in his death and his resurrection it's a light for revelation to us to make the way clear to us and for glory to your people Israel what is the glory of any people well you could say that it's the opposite of their shame and as Proverbs puts it sin is a reproach to any people tonight as we look out over our nation we're filled with sadness people who have so many advantages for whom

[30 : 09] God has done so much in history people who have access to the gospel freely who have the word of God without fear of persecution as in other places in the world and yet from the highest in government right through the strata of society we are characterized by shame shame in which we delight in our sins in sinful ways the pollution of sinfulness and the ungodliness of a life that despises God's standard that's our shame and it's a shame that's very real God knows it but where is the glory then of any people well it's in Christ because when we come to turn to

God individually or collectively as a society or as a people then we come to know what he's saying in this passage it's a light and it's a glory to us as a people we are uplifted we are exalted we are made honourable to God in obedience to the gospel in obedience to his ways in acceptance of his commandments not in despising them or treating them as if we know better let's pray dear friends for glory in our midst once again for glory through Christ to fall upon us for people to take up in their hearts this Jesus so that increasingly we as a people may be exalted by knowing this Christ for ourselves he is the glory of any people and dismissing him and rejecting him and despising him is the shame of any people what God has prepared is not for treating slightly or just treating in a way that just puts it into the rubbish bin of life is to hold it close to your heart and say this indeed is my glory in Christ that's what

I'm given God has honoured us with glory in Christ if we will have him and that's for you and for me the same in our human life there's Simeon's pronouncement I'm going to finish literally in a word with Simeon's prophecy where he said Simeon blessed his father and mother and said behold this child is appointed for the fallen rising of many in Israel and for a sign that is opposed now you see the words in brackets there in verse 25 really a reference directly to Mary she's going to have intense pain in the future when she sees this son that she has brought into the world in his agony and suffering and in his death on the cross especially that's a prophecy that Mary I'm sure kept in mind but if you take out the brackets then you see the run of the words where he says behold this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in

Israel and for a sign that is opposed so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed in other words human destiny all human beings human destiny if you can just summarize it this way is always in relation to Christ to this child lost or saved good or bad the thoughts of many hearts are revealed in relation to him all human philosophies all human inventions of thought that somehow people may think will give them something better than the gospel all kinds of alternative religions that leave out Christ alone as savior the thoughts of all such hearts are measured against Christ against all that is in him and that's where we have to come with our thoughts as every human philosophy has to come to Christ and say how does this fit with what

God has prepared and if it is different to it then get rid of it whatever benefits they may have in it will not be the benefit of salvation so here it is then tonight let me just close like this he began with the sight of Simeon with the infant Jesus in his arms he took him up in his arms he looked down at him and this is what he said let me ask you and let me ask myself am I leaving this service tonight without Jesus in my arms without Jesus in my own personal possession without this Christ as my savior without me being able to say my eyes are seeing your salvation because I am you I have accepted you I have given my life to you you are mine is that so with yourself because for all of you who already have Christ in your possession you know very well that nothing else can compare with him no honor can compare with the honor of having him as your savior of seeing him as your salvation please tonight if you haven't already taken him up take him up now there's no reason why not because he has been prepared for the likes of all of us in our need let's pray

[36 : 24] Lord our God we give thanks that your preparation of salvation has been so thorough so complete so suited to our circumstances and our condition we bless you tonight for your son and for your sending of him into this world we thank you for taking our human nature to yourself for binding it to your divine person that it may be forevermore united to you we thank you for all that you accomplished through our human nature even through to death and resurrection from the grave and exaltation to glory we thank you tonight that the dust of the earth is on the throne of the universe in the person of the God man our saviour Jesus Christ receive our offering we pray in his name and for his sake amen well our final singing this evening is psalm number 118 psalm 118 and that's in the sing psalms version taken to tune before the throne verses 23 to 29 the lord himself has done all this it is a marvel in our sight this is the day the lord has made in it let us take great delight psalm 118 and from verse 23 the lord himself has done all this the lord himself has done all this it is a marvel in our sight this is the day the lord has made in it let us take great delight save us oh lord we humbly pray oh lord we pray grant us success he's blessed who comes in god's great name you from you from the lord's house we will bless you from the lord's house we will bless the lord is god and he has made his glorious light upon us fall let us approach the altars horns and celebrate the festival you are my god i'll give you thanks you are my god i'll give you praise oh thank the lord for he is good his steadfast love endures always his steadfast love endures always i'll go to the main door after the benediction this evening now may the grace of the lord jesus christ the love of god the father and the communion of the holy spirit be with you now and evermore amen has