

Luke 2:22-35

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[0 : 0 0] conversation. It brings to mind, I was 11 years old, I think, and this will tell you how old I am, but one year what I really wanted was a video game system. But this was the original Atari, I don't even know what the number was because it didn't have a number back then. It was just the Atari system with space invaders and asteroids. And my brothers and I had been wanting this for a while, and this was the year we thought maybe we were going to get it. And I remember we'd sort of scope out the boxes as they appeared under the tree and think, is that the right shape? Could that be it?

And remember, and maybe you've experienced this, lying awake on Christmas Eve, wondering, wondering whether you're going to get the thing that you most wanted that Christmas. Christmas. This is what Christmas Eve is about, a time of anticipation, a time of hopes and longings, and what do you want? But for some of us, there might not be a tree. For some of us, there might not be presents. Maybe this year, maybe usually. But there's a deeper reality of what happens on Christmas Eve that I think we can all connect to. And that is that the answer to what do you want for Christmas doesn't have to be a thing. What do you want for Christmas in the depths of your heart?

What do you want in your soul? I came up with a list for me. It starts with a thing. I'd like a new planner to try to help me desperately become slightly more organized.

But, you know, there are other things that are deeper that I long for. I long for my children to know and experience God's love. I want rest from my weary body and soul this Christmas. I want my wife to recover from her current treatment. And I want next year to have more hope and maybe a little less difficulty than this past year has had for me and for my family. I don't know what is in your heart, but I'll just ask the question, what do you want for Christmas this year? Tonight, I want to look at a story in the gospel of Luke chapter 2, and you can turn with me there. The story of a man named Simeon who, on the first Christmas, got all that he ever wanted. So, if you want to turn with me into Luke 2, it's page 725 in your pew Bible. I'm going to start in verse 22 and read this story.

[3 : 0 0] Luke 2, starting in verse 22. When the time of the purification, according to the law of Moses, had been completed, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. As it is written in the law of the Lord, every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the law of the Lord, a pair of doves or two young pigeons. Now, there was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts.

And when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light of revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.

And the child's father and mother marveled at what had been said about him. And then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother, This child is destined to cause the falling and the rising of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be spoken against so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed and a sword will pierce your own soul too. Will you please pray with me? Lord, we thank you this Christmas Eve, Lord, for your word that we would not celebrate this holiday apart from knowing about you in your word and what you have told us. So we thank you tonight for it. We pray, Lord, that this word would bring light to our eyes, Lord, bring joy to our hearts.

As we consider the coming of your son, Jesus. We pray this in his name. Amen. So the story of Simeon is a story of a man who lived in Jerusalem waiting, waiting, waiting, waiting. Waiting for something that he didn't know exactly what it would look like. The consolation of Israel, it says in the text. What does that mean? When we think about consolation or in other translations, it might say comfort. We think of a shoulder to cry on or a pat on the back and a, I'm sorry.

[6 : 03] But this consolation is greater than that. The consolation he was longing for was a much bigger idea. In fact, it was something that would not just give comfort in the middle of a situation, but a consolation that would come and make the situation right.

Why did Simeon need such consolation? Well, think about being a Jew in the first century for a minute.

If you were living with Simeon in that day, you would live under Roman oppression. You would live under Roman rule, speak Roman languages, pay Roman taxes.

They were an occupied people and they longed to be free again. Not only that, but that a first century Jew would have a deep sense of the faded glory of their nation. That once it was a great nation where people from nations all around would send their emissaries to come see the greatness and the glory of Israel. A country of great influence and wealth and cultural richness.

But no more. It would be like perhaps being a citizen of England today, thinking about the 19th century when the sun never set on the British Empire. But no more today.

[7 : 42] But this sense of fading glory wasn't just a political reality for them. But this fading glory was a spiritual reality for them. The temple that they worshipped at was yet just a shadow of what had been before. And even more than that, in Jerusalem, in their capital, in the temple, God had sent his presence to be in that temple. But no more.

And so, they longed. They longed for a consolation. And this is what Simeon had been longing for his whole life.

Waiting and watching. And maybe wondering, God, are you really going to do it? Fighting the bitterness of, it's never going to happen. They wanted God to come and make it right.

Simeon wanted to see God come and make things right. In fact, Simeon had been promised, it says, by the Holy Spirit, that he would not die before he saw the Lord's Christ.

Christ is a word we hear all over this time of year. Maybe you're wondering, just to be clear, Christ isn't Jesus' last name. It means anointed.

[9 : 12] It's a translation of the Hebrew word that we use today, of Messiah. And what it meant was, God had sent someone apart. God would send someone to do this.

Listen to the prophet Isaiah in chapter 52, writing about this servant who would come and bring these things. God commands his people, burst in the songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the Lord has comforted his people.

He has redeemed Jerusalem. The Lord will bear his holy arm in the sight of all nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God.

So this consolation, this comfort, wraps up all of these ideas of joy. Joy because this one will come and overturn their current situation.

Joy because they will come and redeem, that is to buy back Jerusalem out of the oppression. This one will come and restore glory. God will save his people from their situation.

[10 : 21] And Simeon knew all this. And so he waited day after day after day, year after year after year.

Lord, when is it going to come? And then, one day, it happened. Can you imagine being Simeon that day? Says the Holy Spirit led him to the temple.

and he saw Mary and Joseph bringing this baby in. We don't know what he saw. We don't know how he knew. But he walked over and he took the baby in his arms and he said the most amazing thing.

He said, Lord, now I can go. Lord, now let me depart. He said, Lord, I can die now because the thing that I've wanted more than anything else is here.

Why did he say that? What does he mean? Look with me again in verses 30 to 32 just to flesh this out. He said, For my eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light of revelation to the Gentiles.

[11 : 40] and for glory to your people, Israel. The fundamental salvation that we see in Scripture is not from our circumstances.

It's not from political oppression. It's not from the fading status of our country and the world. As we read in the Gospel of Matthew earlier, this one was named Jesus because he would save people from sin, from our sin.

And what that word means is it's our fundamental predisposition to reject God, to want glory apart from God, to want power and influence on our own, apart from God.

Or we want to keep God in the margins of our lives, safely tucked away where we can stay in control. and the Bible shows us that this attitude towards God is offensive.

And it brings his judgment against us, a separation so that we cannot know God and we do not have the ability to live rightly because of it.

[12:52] And this is the greatest oppression of all. This is the greatest fated glory of all. And Simeon saw this baby and he said, this one has come to make it right.

My eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people. Simeon saw that Jesus didn't just come for a few people, Jesus didn't come just for Israel, but that he came for all people, that he would bring light to the Gentiles, that he would come and say, do you want to know who God is?

Look here. Do you want to know how to know God? Look at me. A light of revelation in the midst of our fogginess when we long to, God, how can I know you?

How can I understand who you are? Jesus comes and says, look at me. I am God come to you. a light of revelation to the Gentiles and glory for his people Israel.

In the first century, they longed for glory to return to the temple because that meant that God was with them and that God was for them and Jesus comes. Simeon looks at him and he says, God is now with us.

[14:18] God is for us again. God is for us again. This is why he is Emmanuel, God with us.

And the glory of God being with his people, that is for all who have believed in him, for those who have trusted in what Jesus would go on to do, to die on the cross for that sin, for that rebellion, for that rejection against God.

He would save us. He is now with us. And for all who have placed their faith in him, they can have hope that this glory will be theirs, that they're free from the oppression of sin and their glory is renewed to be God's people again.

And this is glad tidings of great joy for all people. And that's why Simeon said, Lord, now I can die because the thing I've been waiting for my whole life, the thing that this world has been waiting for ever since the fall of mankind has come.

and now I can die because God can be known. God was with his people. God will save in this one Jesus. He had such joy.

[15:58] He said, Lord, now it doesn't matter if I live and die because I've seen the one that I've always longed for. So, Simeon had this incredible, powerful experience of seeing who Jesus was.

And you know, as we consider, as I consider the question of what do I want for Christmas, maybe this text points to reformulating the question for us.

Maybe the greatest thing that we could get for Christmas this year is not what we most want for Christmas, but the thing that God most wants for us that this Jesus would be ours, that he would come deliver us, that he would come and bring us into his glory, and that this would be greater than any gaming system, any family reunion, any new new years of hope, that this would be the greatest thing that we could get.

Tonight, I want to close with a prayer, which is the last stanza of A Little Town of Bethlehem. We just sang it a few minutes ago, but let me read this and pray, and then we'll close with one more song.

The hymn says this, O holy child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray. Cast out our sin and enter in. Be born in us today. We hear the Christmas angels, the great glad tidings tell.

[17:48] O come to us. Abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel. Let's pray. God bless.

God bless.