

Simeon's Song

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[0 : 00] Well, the waiting is over. For some of you kids, Christmas has arrived. How many people open presents yet? Oh, such self-control. Way to go. It is a joyful day as we celebrate the birth of Jesus and the gift that he is. And for some of you, this is a wonderful day. It is a day of hopes fulfilled, of desires met as you've gathered with family, as you've opened presents, as you've hopefully gotten a weekend to rest, and you're here this morning worshipping, worshipping God. What a great morning it is. But I also recognize that for some of you, today is less of a hopeful day.

Today you come this morning still with longings unmet, things you've been longing for, you're still waiting for, things that have been lost and hopes that have been deferred and desires that have been unmet. And today you come with a heart sickness of that longing and of that waiting.

Think of the line from the hymn, A Little Town of Bethlehem, the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight. How can we say that? Well, our Christmas text this morning is about a man who'd been waiting. And when he met the newborn Jesus, he knew that his waiting had ended. And the joy that he had at meeting Jesus can be ours as well this Christmas morning. So our text is from Luke 2, starting in verse 22. It is the story of Simeon and Jesus being presented at the temple. It's on page 805 in your pew Bibles, if you want to turn there, or if you have a Bible you want to turn to Luke 2.

We're going to read this passage, we're going to pray, and then we'll just reflect on it for a few minutes this morning. So Luke 2, starting in verse 22. And when the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. As it is written in the law of the Lord, every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord, and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, quote, a pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons.

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. 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 customs 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 the peoples a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel. And his father and mother marveled at what was said about him, and Simon 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 heart, your own soul also, so that the thoughts from many hearts may be revealed. Friends, this is God's word.

[3 : 44] Let's pray together. Lord, we ask, we ask this morning that as we meditate for just a minute on this text, that you would be with us, that your spirit would illuminate our minds, and even more so that your spirit would, Lord, fill our hearts with joy at the awe and wonder of the gift of the baby Jesus, of the person of Jesus to this world. Lord, be with me. Help me to speak as I ought this morning, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. In this passage, we see the heart of a man longing, the heart that waits for Jesus, and then a joyful heart of the one who meets Jesus. So a heart that's waiting for Jesus and a heart that's full of joy at meeting Jesus. Let's look at this briefly this morning. So first of all, the heart waiting for Jesus. Simeon, seemingly he was an old man. It doesn't say actually that he's old, but it seems like he's been waiting for a while at the temple because God had told him.

God had said, you will not die before you see the one who's coming to fulfill the promises. Why did he need a consolation? Because it says he was waiting for the consolation of Israel.

Now, consolation, we want to make sure we understand this. It's not like a consolation prize, like, oh, you lose, but you get the, you know, the peanut butter and jelly sandwich on the side. It's not a consolation like that, nor is it the kind of consolation that sometimes we give to one another, which is a pat on the shoulder and a quick, I'm so sorry for you. The consolation here is actually something substantive. It is real help. It is the satisfaction of a desire and a longing that's connected to the fulfillment of God's promises. And that's the consolation that God, that Simeon was waiting for. He wasn't hoping for just empathy. He was hoping for real solution, a real solving, a real meeting of his needs. And look, as he was a first century Jew, living under Roman oppression, think about some of the longings that he might have, right? The people of God were living under another power, subject to Roman taxation, Roman law, Roman language.

He was also, as a first century Jew, mourning and longing for a glory that his nation and people once had that they had no longer. Once they had been a large kingdom, now they were a subject province.

Once they had had a glory in their temple and that glory had departed and was no longer. Even their temple had been destroyed and the one that replaced it was small compared to the one that they had before.

[6 : 44] The smaller sign lacked the presence of God. And so this is the ultimate longing that Simeon had.

He had a longing to see God show up and to fulfill his promises. Because God had promised a coming restoration, a coming deliverer, a new covenant era when external religion would be transformed into spirit-filled, heart-changing, life-transforming, relating to God.

And his people had been waiting and longing for centuries. Longer than anyone's lifespan.

Battling against despair, wondering how long they would have to wait. This was Simeon waiting for the consolation of Israel.

And I wonder what kind of consolation you need this morning. What are you looking forward to seeing God do in your life today?

[7 : 51] Maybe you're living with a sense of faded glory in your own life. It's not turned out the way you wanted it to be. Your career is not what you hoped it would be. Your family is not what you longed it would be.

Maybe the dreams of your youth feel like they're slipping through your fingers in the harsh reality of a fallen world. Maybe you're just living with the malaise that the world that we live in is not the way it ought to be.

And you long for a new season. A new change to see God at work in your life. Maybe specifically it's in your spiritual life. Do you wonder, where is God at work in my life today?

Do you long for a new season of joy in relationship to him? Are you struggling with disappointment and bitterness, despair? Maybe you're here this morning and you've let him slip to the margins of your life and wondered how you've gotten there.

Maybe you're here and you're wondering if God is nudging into your life for the first time and you're not sure what to do with that. Friends, there may be lots of reasons why you may be here this morning needing consolation, needing real help.

[9 : 07] Simeon was waiting to see the Lord's Christ, the one who would come to bring fulfillment to all of God's promises. And he was doing so in faith.

He showed up at the temple every day, waiting, looking. And then this day came when Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the temple and he saw him.

And he looked at him and he said, Now, now I've seen it. Now I've seen the thing that I've been longing for. The hymn writers say, The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.

That's what Simeon was singing. Now I can die. For I have seen the fulfillment. Because I've seen this baby. I've seen Jesus. Friends, if we see who Jesus is, as Simeon saw him, maybe we too can have that same kind of joy.

The joy of a heart that's fulfilled in meeting Jesus. Because Simeon's response is really remarkable, isn't it? Right? This is the one thing I need.

[10 : 16] As long as I have this one thing, then everything else doesn't matter. If I have this one thing, then I can die. And Simeon sees Jesus as that one thing.

And as he reflects on it in verses 29 through 35, you see some of the things that he sees in Jesus that I hope we can see in Jesus this morning. Four things.

First, in 25 through 29, Jesus is the consolation and the comfort of Israel. You see, Jesus came as God incarnate in the flesh to identify with us in our weakness.

He is real help because he is not a God who is far off and cannot understand what it means to struggle in human flesh. But one who entered in with us, who suffered just as we are, who was tempted just as we are, and yet was without sin.

It means that we have a God who came to walk with us. That God has not abandoned us. But that he has come to us in a most remarkable way so that he can be real comfort along the way.

[11 : 35] One of the things that's amazing about this part of the scriptures is that Simeon was clearly steeped in the Old Testament, and particularly the book of Isaiah. So as we look at different parts of what Simeon sees in Jesus, I'm going to quote different lines from the book of Isaiah to help you see the richness of where he saw it.

And so in Isaiah 40, verse 1, the prophet says, Comfort my people. Say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God.

And when Simeon saw Jesus walk into the temple, he said, This is it. The comfort has arrived. I have seen my God come to his people.

To be their deliverer. And this is the second thing that you see. Jesus is not only the consolation of Israel, but in verse 30, Jesus is the very salvation of God. Simeon says, For my eyes have seen your salvation.

And remember that all in the first century of Rome, they were longing for political oppression. They were longing for political freedom and salvation. They were longing for social freedom from the imposition of Roman culture and Roman life on them.

[12 : 49] Someone who would come and deliver the nation of Israel so that they could be free again, not only from political and social, but even from spiritual bondage, so that they would again arise as God's people.

And yet Jesus comes with a salvation greater than just a societal or a national salvation. He comes to save us from our sin.

He comes to be the one who sets the captives free from sin and death. It's why he's named Jesus, God who saves.

And so Isaiah reminds us, Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted.

He was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. Upon him was a chastisement that brought us peace. And with his wounds, we are healed.

[13 : 51] Friends, when Simeon saw this baby, he saw the fulfillment of that prophecy, that this one would come and live and die and rise again for our salvation, so that we might not live under the judgment of God, but we might be raised to new life, eternal life, because of faith in him.

And that's what Simeon saw. Jesus is not only the consolation of Israel, he's not only the very salvation of God, but third in verse 32, he is a light unto the Gentiles.

This may be so old news for us in this, the 21st century, but in the first century, this was groundbreaking.

God's work was not just for the Jewish people. And though there were hints, and even more than hints throughout the Old Testament, that this was ultimately going to be God's plan, as Jesus came, he solidified and clarified that the God who had come in the person of Jesus had come for all people, from every tribe and tongue and nation, from every corner of the earth.

He had come not just to be a local God, but the God of the whole world, not a God just for certain kinds of people, from certain places or certain cultures, but for all of us.

[15 : 13] And how amazing it is that Jesus came for you, and for you, and for you, and for you, for your neighbors, and for your friends, and for people we haven't met who live on the other side of the world.

There is no one excluded from the light being shown by Jesus, revealed to the whole nation, to the whole world.

What a great God this is. And so Isaiah reminds us in 49.6, it is too light of a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel.

I will make you as a light for the nations that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.

Finally, verse 32, Jesus comes as the glory for his people Israel.

Isaiah 60 says, Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples, but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you, and nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.

[16 : 43] Isaiah looks ahead to someone who would come and show and display this light, this awe, this wonder, this glory, this expression of the character and nature of who God is in all of its fullness.

and remember what John in the first chapter of his gospel says, right? That Jesus is the word who became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have beheld his glory.

This is the light that Simeon saw. This is the beauty that Simeon saw that Jesus had come to display all of God, his holiness, his majesty, his righteousness, his power, his transcendence, his grace, and his mercy, and his love, and his kindness, and his patience, and ultimately, his desire to make a people for himself, to make a people who would humble themselves and bow their knee before this one, and let him retake the throne of their lives and be the world and take the throne of their lives so that he might be their king.

Jesus comes to call us to know him and to worship him. There's one final thing that we need to see in this passage in verses 34 and 35.

These are not simple words that he says to Mary. It's kind of shocking because he talks about a sword. Behold, this child shall be 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 the thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.

[18 : 35] Friends, we don't need to get caught up. I believe that Simeon is capturing imagery that God uses throughout the Old Testament to say that what Jesus does when he comes is he calls us to respond and he searches out our hearts and as he comes he creates a divide because there are some as we saw in his life and especially in his death, there are some who would reject him.

There were some who will refuse him. There were some who will deny that he is who Simeon saw him to be. And there will be some who will respond. There will be some who will see him in all of his goodness and greatness and glory and they will respond to him.

And Jesus comes like a signpost pointing us in a direction that we can follow or ignore. He comes like a sword that divides and separates because of his presence. He comes revealing the depths of our hearts with a call and an invitation.

Simeon saw that this is what Jesus had come to do. To call people, to invite people out of darkness into light, out of selfishness into subjection to him.

Serving him out of alienation and into love and his loving embrace. This is what Simeon saw. And this is why he was filled with such great joy.

[20 : 10] This is why he could say, now, God, I can die. Now, let me go in peace because I've seen the glory of this baby and what he would come to do. How about you this morning?

How will you respond? Jesus invites you and he invites me to come. Come to him and believe.

Whether this morning is a morning where you feel like everything is great in the world and the joy is yours because of the good things, let those be a signpost to this greater joy.

This greater joy that God has given us in Christ. And if you're here this morning and your longings are unfulfilled and your heart is burdened, Jesus says, come.

Come and see me as the greatest consolation, the greatest hope, the one that you've been waiting for. Come and know the joy of Simeon and the saints of all of us who have followed in his footsteps. Let's pray together. Lord Jesus, we do thank you this morning. We thank you for, Lord, the reason why we gather on Christmas morning for it's when the church historically remembers and commemorates the birth of Jesus, the sending of your Son to earth for our salvation.

[21 : 39] Oh, Lord, I pray this morning that you would fill us with joy. Lord, I pray for those who are hurting, Lord, who are carrying burdens, Lord, that you would come alongside of them and that you would be their consolation.

Lord, I pray for all of us that we might know the joy that we can have in believing in Jesus and having him because he has made us his own.

Oh, Lord, be with us. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.