

Joy for the hopeful - Simeon's song

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[0 : 00] You might like to take your Bibles and turn up Luke chapter 2, which somebody will tell me the page number. Oh, it's on the screen.

There we are, 857. Good. We're going to read Luke chapter 2 at verse 22. And when the time came for their purification, according to the law of Moses, they brought Jesus up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord, as it is written in the law of the Lord, every male who 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, 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 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.

[1 : 30] For my eyes have seen your salvation, that you prepared in the presence of all peoples a light for the revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.

And his father and his mother wondered at what was said about him. And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, Behold, this child was 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. And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher.

She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin and then as a widow until she was 84. She did not depart from the temple, worshipping with fasting and prayer night and day.

And coming up at that very hour, she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

[2 : 42] Amen. May God bless to us his word. Well, we've been looking this Christmas at the very first songs of Christmas. Christmas songs are not a modern phenomenon.

Right from the very beginning, the Savior's birth was surrounded by song. And it shouldn't surprise us when the greatest cause for rejoicing ever came into this world, the coming of the Son of God.

It shouldn't surprise us that that event would be immersed in music and song. Listen to what Martin Luther, the great Protestant reformer, says about music and song.

He says, Next to the word of God, the noble art of music is the greatest treasure in the world. It controls our thoughts, minds, hearts, and spirits.

This precious gift has been given to man alone that he might thereby remind himself that God has created man for the express purpose of praising and extolling God.

[3 : 45] He says, Well, they were rather robust in the 16th century, weren't they, in what they said. But nevertheless, I think he's right. Well, we've looked at Mary's song. We've looked at Zechariah's song. We've looked last night at the angel's song. And today, we're going to look at Simeon's song, the Nunc Dimittis, as it's sometimes called.

Actually, it's more of a duet, because as we find in our reading towards the end, Anna, the prophetess, chips in her voice as well. So we have two, I'm going to call them hopeful pensioners.

It's a song of two hopeful pensioners. They have at least two things in common. But one thing united them both. They were both people who were waiting for a savior.

They were both very old. We're not told exactly how old Simeon was, but clearly he was an old man approaching death. But if you look at verse 37 in Luke chapter 2 in your Bibles, you'll see that Anna, well, we are told, we're told either she was 84, or in fact, if you look at the footnote of your Bible, it could be, it's a bit ambiguous, the Greek language here, it could be that she was married seven years, and then lived another 84 years after that.

[5 : 18] So let's assume she got married at 16, lived for seven years as married, and then was widowed for 84. That would make her 107. So whether she's 84 or 107, she's still a woman in good voice.

But either way, both of these folk had clearly been pensioners for a very long time. But secondly, they were both people of faith and hope. That is, they were true believers in the promise of God.

Verse 25 says they were righteous and devout. It's like chapter 1, verse 6, what we're told about Zechariah and Elizabeth. It means that they were godly people.

They were people devoted to God's commands and his statutes. But verse 25 tells us what that righteousness and devoutness means.

You see the second half of verse 25? It means they were looking to God to work salvation. They were waiting for the consolation of Israel.

[6 : 19] They were waiting for the promised salvation of God that the whole of the law and the prophets pointed forward to. Very important to grasp that clearly, isn't it?

Because the whole Old Testament Israelite faith was about exactly that. It was about the promise of a coming Savior. And people of faith were waiting for that day, hopefully.

They were showing their faith by their obedience to God's commands and God's word. The hope of their hearts for God was visible, if you like, in the obedience of their bodies to God.

And that's always the mark of real faith as far as the Bible is concerned. Real faith is visible in lives that live in submission to God's ways. So that's the first thing to say by way of introduction.

Here are two elderly saints, faithful, obedient to God, and longing for God's great salvation to be revealed. Well, I hope that's true of me when I'm 84 or 107.

[7 : 27] I'm sure you do too. Faithful, obedient, hopeful people waiting for a Savior. And that's why I think verse 25 says to us that the Holy Spirit was upon Simeon.

And notice Luke's story has been full of the Holy Spirit, hasn't it? The Holy Spirit came on Mary and she conceived Jesus the Savior. The Holy Spirit filled John, do you remember, even in his mother's womb when Mary arrived at Elizabeth's house.

The Holy Spirit opened Zechariah's mouth after he'd been struck dumb and he was filled with song about Jesus the Savior. And here again, the Holy Spirit had spoken to Simeon, verse 26, and had told him about Jesus the Savior and now had led him to Jesus right into his presence.

And again, that is always the mark of the Holy Spirit according to the Bible. To speak of Jesus, to reveal Jesus to the human heart, and to lead people into a personal encounter with Jesus the Savior.

To see and to know the Lord's Christ. That's what the Holy Spirit is doing. And that's what he did for old Simeon. That's what he's still doing today, all over the world, today and every day.

[8 : 45] That's what he's doing here this morning as we're gathered here in this place. Jesus' family too were guided by the Scriptures. You see that in verse 27.

They were following every word of God's law obediently, just as Simeon was. And through that, the Holy Spirit had led these people to an encounter with Jesus.

That's an unchanging pattern. Wherever people seek to obey God's word in Scripture, to follow his directions, the Holy Spirit is at work leading people to an encounter with Jesus the Savior.

You see what happens when the Holy Spirit speaks of Jesus, and leads to Jesus, and reveals Jesus. People receive the Lord Jesus Christ, and they welcome him with joy.

Verse 28. Simeon took him in his arms and blessed God. And this is a song about receiving Jesus Christ. It's about what it means to welcome Jesus as God's wonderful Savior.

[9 : 54] And Simeon, with Anna's help in the last verse of his song, he tells us four things about what it means to welcome Jesus personally.

Well, do pick up your Bible again, back to this story of two elderly saints waiting for a Savior, and then, in their song, wonderfully welcoming the Savior.

And the first thing that old Simeon tells us about welcoming Jesus, about taking Jesus Christ in your arms as Savior, is that he tells us it means a wonderful reception of peace.

Look at verse 29. Now, Lord, you are letting your servant depart in peace according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation. To welcome Jesus, to receive Jesus as Savior, means to be a sharer in the peace of the gospel, personally, in your own heart.

And that peace is nothing vague, it's nothing sentimental. Simeon speaks about it here as something very real and tangible and practical.

[11 : 08] It's very clear in at least two senses, you see. First, it brings an overwhelming contentment about our earthly life and existence. For Simeon, you see, whatever his material lack might have been, whatever his world they once were, for him to see God's salvation, to welcome Christ personally, to know Jesus as the Savior, was enough.

It was enough for his whole life. There need be no regrets anymore. Now he could depart in peace. Utter contentment about earthly life, that's what he's expressing.

It's a great contrast, isn't it, to so much of what we see and hear all around about us today in our consumer society. If we're not consuming, if we're not meeting our insatiable desires, our cravings, our wants, then we can't be content.

And that is certainly all around us at Christmas. I was reading in the paper just the other day about 10 things you must do in 2015. I saw a book about 1,001 things you must do before you die.

Well, for Simeon, that's not true anymore. There's just one thing. Taking the Lord Jesus Christ in his arms, that's enough. That brought peace. That brought absolute contentment in his life.

[12 : 31] And you know, even many Christians have lives blighted with discontent, don't they? We want things, we need things. We're bitter, perhaps, about things we once had and don't have anymore.

Positions that we once had. Places we once had. A relationship we once had. Maybe we learn this morning from Simeon something very important about contentment.

About welcoming the Savior again in a new way into our lives. To know that peace that he knew. But it's not just peace and contentment about life that he's speaking about, is it?

It's about peace as a real absence of fear about death. Let me depart in peace, he says. I can face the grave now without any dread because my eyes have seen your salvation in Jesus Christ.

And he means that that, too, is the great peace that belongs to those who have welcomed Jesus themselves as Savior. Good Christian men, rejoice.

[13 : 37] Now ye need not fear the grave. Because Jesus Christ has come to save. It's a great joy, isn't it? A great strength when we speak to those who are facing death and who know they're facing death.

And yet they have no fear because they have taken the Lord Jesus Christ into their arms as Savior. And they can depart in peace. Well, that was Simeon.

Welcoming the Savior for him was a reception of peace. He became a sharer in the peace that only the gospel of Jesus Christ can bring. But it wasn't just that.

Secondly, for him, it was also a revelation of purpose. Look at verse 30. For my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, all the pagan non-Jewish peoples, and for glory to your people Israel.

You see, to welcome Jesus as Savior means to become a sharer in the purpose of the gospel of God. And to see that the story of the whole world finds its meaning and its answer in Jesus Christ the Lord.

[14 : 58] It's not just meaning. It's not just peace that comes to your personal world. Welcoming Jesus is the thing that brings light and glory to the whole of world history, past and present and future.

You see, Simeon was a true believer. And so he knew that God was God over the whole earth, not just the God of Israel, and that his purpose of salvation was for all the peoples of the earth, not just for the Jews.

But he sees that all this, all God's saving revelation for this whole earth, was found in one person, in this baby, in the one who had been born as Jesus of Nazareth.

Verse 31, he is the salvation who is revealed in the presence of all peoples. Verse 32, he is the light for revealing the one, only, and true God to all, both Jew and Gentile, all this world.

That is, he is the revelation of purpose and meaning in this world for Middle Eastern Jews like Simeon, and Muslims, and Tibetan Buddhists, and Asian animists, and Western secularists, and everybody, whatever their creed or culture or background.

[16 : 17] Many, many people, of course, are quite blind to that truth. They think, perhaps, that there are many different gods in this world, or much the same, or perhaps at least that there are many, many different ways to find the one true God.

But you see, Simeon is saying no to that. He is saying that this child and this child alone is the way. He is the revelation of God.

He is the salvation of God for all peoples. And he is the heart and the focus of all the purpose of the creator of this world.

And you see, anybody whom the Holy Spirit leads to know Jesus and to welcome Jesus like Simeon will immediately have their eyes open to understand that. Not only does their own life suddenly make sense, but the whole world makes sense at last.

It finds its meaning and purpose in the Lord Jesus Christ. And so receiving Jesus is to receive a revelation of purpose about your own life and about this whole world and everything in it and all that it means.

- [17 : 31] And it means to begin to share in the purpose of God and his gospel for this world. It means that we recognize the unique and only Savior.

As the carol says, we hail redemption's happy dawn. And we sing through all Jerusalem that Christ, the answer, is born in Bethlehem.

Well, once more, back to page 857, Luke chapter 2. To welcome Jesus, as Simeon did, means, as he sings to us, means a reception of peace for our personal world.

We share in the peace of the gospel of Christ. It means a revelation of purpose for the whole world. We share in the purpose of God's gospel plan for the world.

But also, if you look at verses 34 and 35, it means something different. It means a realization of pain. To welcome Jesus personally means also to become a sharer in the pain of the gospel.

- [18 : 41] There's a dark side to Simeon's message. You see that in these words that he addresses here to Jesus' parents, verse 34. And Simeon blessed them, and he 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. You see, it's the realization, isn't it, that to be caught up in the story of the Savior is to be caught up also in the disturbance that Jesus and his gospel provokes everywhere and always, both in the world and in our human hearts.

There's a very real sense in which Jesus came also not to bring peace, but to bring a sword. In fact, Luke records him saying that very thing later on in his gospel. I come not to bring peace, but a sword, a sword of division, to divide, even within families, even within the closest bonds of human life.

Jesus Christ is the great divider of human beings. And he has been right from the very beginning, and Simeon knew that, and that's what he speaks about here.

He's honest about it. He's saying to us that you can't receive Jesus, you can't follow Jesus, without walking also in Jesus' way. As you read through Luke's gospel, you see very plainly that the way of Jesus is the long road to Calvary.

- [20 : 18] It's the road to the cross. And Simeon is recalling here words of the prophet Isaiah, words that he spoke about the coming one in Isaiah chapter 8.

He says he will become a sanctuary, that is, he'll be a place of peace and salvation. But he goes on, and also, a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to many.

And if you read on in Luke's gospel, you find that that is precisely what happened. That was true then, and of course it's still true today. And any believer, anyone who welcomes Jesus Christ, as Simeon did, as their personal Savior, they will discover that too.

Verse 35, you see the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed when they're confronted with the message of Jesus, because Jesus Christ shines the light of heaven into our hearts.

And when he does that, he exposes many things. And there are many, therefore, who find his light a rock of offense. They're offended at the demands that Jesus makes upon their lives, daring, perhaps, to criticize their lifestyle, daring to criticize their loves, daring to criticize their ambitions, daring to criticize their determination to live autonomously and not under his rule and his direction.

- [21 : 48] It's very offensive when we're confronted by what Jesus says to us. And so Jesus and his message is always destined to be a sign that is opposed.

And that's what Simeon saw and said right back then. And that, friends, is a pain that no true follower of the Lord Jesus Christ can avoid. There is a sword that pierces the soul of everyone who loves him and truly welcomes him.

That's the Simeon laid out very frankly to his own mother. There's a dark side to following one who is a man of sorrows. And the Bible doesn't hide it.

And Simeon is right up front. But nevertheless, this song doesn't end with sorrow, but with joy. With the joy of octogenarian Anna, or perhaps even centenarian Anna, as she chips in.

Look at verses 36 to 38, because Anna chimes in her part to this song to remind us that receiving Jesus is, and perhaps above all, is a response of praise and proclamation.

[22 : 59] You see, to welcome and to receive Jesus personally means to become a sharer in the praise and the proclamation of the gospel. Verse 36, there was a prophetess Anna, the daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher.

She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, and then as a widow until she was 84, or even perhaps for 84 years. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day.

And now, coming up at that very hour, she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him, that is Jesus, to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

Whether Anna was 86 or 107 hardly matches. What is clear is that this is a woman who had been focused all her life on God's plan of salvation, on his gospel.

She is a truly gospel-hearted woman. That's what we're being told here. And verse 37 says, her whole life was focused on longing for God, longing for him to come at last, as promised with his saving power for the world.

[24 : 14] And that was what filled her prayers. That was what filled her consciousness in life. And others like her who were waiting, similarly, for the redemption that God had promised. And you see, friends, people who make God's desires, their own heart's desires, are people who can never in the end be disappointed.

Verse 38 says that she came at that very hour that Jesus was brought to the temple. For God answered her prayers in that most marvelous of ways.

And she knew that her prayers had been answered. She knew that she had found God's Savior, the Christ of God. She knew that in finding Jesus, even in this little tiny baby, she had found the salvation that was promised.

And she entered the story of God's salvation forever. She and all her age's life had been caught up in that wonderful drama of God's promises.

And now, towards the end of her life, she is caught up in a most magnificent way in God's purpose of saving grace. And what did it mean for her? For this ancient warrior of the faith?

[25 : 32] Well, you see verse 38, she threw aside her zimmer. That's in the Greek, but it's not in our translation. She threw aside her zimmer, she jumped up, and she started praising God.

Her heart was opened to the Savior's presence, and so her lips were opened in the Savior's praise. And she sings. And her response, we're told, is praise to God and proclamation of his Son.

She spoke of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem, for all who were seeking that peace, that purpose in life that God had promised.

They're all who were seeking all the things that only a true and living and mighty powerful Savior could ever bring. You see, proclamation of the one who has come as Savior, that is the greatest praise to God that anyone can ever give, isn't it?

That's what thrills the heart of God the Father. Not the sweetness of our song, hallelujah, but the subject of our song. And he rejoices when our lips make his Son known throughout all this world.

[26 : 50] That's real praise to God. The sing of the Savior to all who are longing for redemption, like Anna did. No doubt some of these people were like Anna.

They knew where to look. They knew eagerly what God was going to do. They were waiting for God. But I'm sure that there were many others whose hope was real but just vague. Perhaps they'd become dispirited.

Perhaps they'd been despairing. Maybe they'd given up hope altogether of ever seeing an answer to their prayers. Of ever getting out of the bit of the humdrum, mundane, relentless existence of human life.

Maybe some of these had really no expectation of God left at all. Well, that is the world, isn't it? Today, just as it was then. There are many, many people with a longing deep in their hearts for something more, something real to live for, something to bring real purpose and hope into their lives, but just not knowing where that's ever really going to come from.

Well, in Jesus Christ, friends, we have found peace for our own lives and our own history. We've found purpose for this whole world and all of its history.

[28 : 09] And although, yes, there will always also be pain for those who follow Jesus, as long as the world rejects him, that will always be so.

Nevertheless, those who have welcomed him, those who have taken God's Savior in their own arms, made him theirs personally, they will always be, like Anna, people of praise and proclamation.

They become heralds, just like the herald angels, singing God's glory to the world, singing to all who long for redemption, for hope, for meaning, for purpose, for salvation.

Whether they're longing consciously and searching, or whether they're just in their own aimless and hopeless way, they don't really know what they're doing or where they're looking.

Praise to God and proclamation of Jesus his Son. That is the song that defines the true people of God. And so, on this Christmas morning, let's end by singing ourselves, along with all the citizens of heaven above.

[29 : 20] Come, and behold him, born the King of angels. Come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord. The song that defines the true people of God.

And so, on this Christmas morning, let's end by singing ourselves, along with all the citizens of heaven above. Come, and behold him, born the King of angels.

Come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord. Lord. Choir ■ Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

[32 : 51] Amen. Amen.

Let's pray. Lord, now you are letting your servants depart in peace according to your word. For our eyes also have seen your salvation prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to this world and for glory to your people Israel.

And I may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

A very happy Christmas to all of you.