



"The Song of Simeon"
Sermon Series: "The Canticles of Christmas"
Luke 2:21-35
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Luke 2:21-35

(New International Version 1984, ©1984)

Jesus Presented in the Temple

²¹ On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise him, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he had been conceived.

²² When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ²³ (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord"^[a]), ²⁴ 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."^[b]

²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. ²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. ²⁷ Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, ²⁸ Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

²⁹ "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,
you now dismiss^[c] your servant in peace.
³⁰ For my eyes have seen your salvation,
³¹ which you have prepared in the sight of all people,
³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles
and for glory to your people Israel."

³³ The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him. ³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, ³⁵ so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."

Footnotes:

- a. [Luke 2:23](#) Exodus 13:2,12
- b. [Luke 2:24](#) Lev. 12:8
- c. [Luke 2:29](#) Or promised, / now dismiss

Introduction.

Lorie reminds me from time to time that I suffer from "male refrigerator blindness." I can be looking for something, like a jar of mayonnaise, in the refrigerator, trying with all my might to find it, and not see the thing, even when it is right underneath my nose. Any of your other men suffer from this disease?



Perhaps I should ask the women in the congregation if their men suffer from this illness! Some of us have a problem seeing something even when it is right in front of us.

This is nothing new. All over the world and throughout human history, people have been unaware of the most amazing things, even when the truth was right in front of them. For example, On December 17, 1903, at Kitty Hawk, NC, Orville and Wilbur Wright did what no one had ever done before. They flew a craft that was heavier than air for the first time in history. Elated, they sent a telegram to their sister Katherine which read, "We have actually flown 120 feet. Will be home for Christmas." Hurriedly, she ran down the street and gave the telegram, the big news scoop of the young century, to the city editor of the local newspaper. He read it carefully, smiled, and then he said, "Well, well! How nice. The boys will be home for Christmas."ⁱⁱ He didn't see the amazing truth right in front of him!

2,000 years ago a young couple made their way into the temple of Jerusalem to do what the Jewish law required after the birth of their firstborn son. That day they walked past many people who didn't take any notice of the young family. They were not aware of the amazing truth of God's salvation right in front of them. But there was one old man who saw with eyes of faith. His name was Simeon, and when he realized just who that baby was, he sang a song of praise that has reverberated down through the centuries. As we prepare to celebrate the birth of Christ this week, I want you to reflect with me on Simeon's character, Simeon's Song, and Simeon's prediction.

I. Simeon's Character.

"Now there was a man in Jerusalem called 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. 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..." (2:25-27).

What was it that enabled Simeon to see what others missed that day? How did he develop eyes of faith while others were blind to the truth of God? I believe it was Simeon's character and his spiritual habits of faithfulness which enabled him to see what others missed, and a lifetime of following the Lord prepared him for that day.

There are several things this passage says about Simeon. **First**, it says that he was righteous and devout. Simeon was regular in worship, and he walked with God on a daily basis. His heart was fully devoted to the Lord, and he sought to be a person of integrity and principle. Have you ever been around a person like that? The word that comes to mind which describes them is "holy." I've known a handful of people like that in my life, and whenever I'm around them they stir in me a desire to be a better person. That's the kind of person Simeon was.

The text also tells us he was waiting for the consolation of Israel. This means he was looking for God to provide relief to the nation and liberty to the people. For many centuries, Israel had been a conquered nation, and the people were subjected to a series of foreign governments after they lost their independence. Yet there were those who held out hope that God would one day send a deliverer as He had done before. They yearned for the day when God would send another one like Moses who would lead the people to freedom, and the OT was filled with promises of a Messiah who would bring salvation to the world. Simeon was a person who looked to the future with hope despite the despair of outward circumstances. He believed God wasn't finished with His chosen people just yet, and he was waiting for the consolation of Israel.

Finally, the passage says the Holy Spirit was upon Simeon, and he was moved by the Spirit of God to go into the temple that day. Simeon was a person who was sensitive to the leading of the Lord, and he



responded to the nudges of the Spirit. God revealed to him he would not die before he had seen the Messiah, so in faith he waited with eagerness for the time when God would keep this promise. When that time came, Simeon was attentive to the Lord's leading by His Spirit.

Simeon saw with eyes of faith, and he understood the true identity of Jesus because of his character and his spiritual maturity. What is your character like this Christmas? Are you making progress in your maturity in Christ? Have you, like me, lost your sanctification a few times during the holidays because of the stress and strain of the season? Or are you walking in peace and with a purity of heart, looking for Jesus in your daily life? Have we been so busy that Christ has passed right underneath our noses, and we missed Him and the blessing He wanted to give us this Christmas? Cultivating the character of Christ is so important at this or any time of the year.

Several years ago, I had the privilege of officiating at the memorial service for a man named Dennis in my former church. He died after a valiant battle with lung cancer, a disease he developed in spite of the fact that he never smoked a day in his life. Lorie and I visited Dennis and his wife Pat in their home a few days before he died. It was a very special time I will never forget.

After the four of us talked for a while, Pat and I excused ourselves to go to kitchen to discuss things and make plans for the memorial service. Lorie remained with Dennis. He was on oxygen and had trouble catching his breath, but as he lay in his bed he said to Lorie something we will never forget. He said, "Lorie, wherever you go, you leave a scent with people in the way you live your life. The scent is either a good one, or it's a bad one. Make sure that when it's your time to go, you leave a good scent." Dennis was right, and he was one who left a good scent wherever he went.

I am convinced it is our character and our spiritual maturity that determines the kind of scent we leave, and Simeon left a good scent with Mary and Joseph that day.

II. Simeon's Song.

Many of you took me up on my challenge to write your own canticle of Christmas, and I've been blessed reading the ones you've sent me. If you haven't done it yet, there is still time before Christmas. In this passage we find the song of Simeon. It is called the *Nunc Dimittis* in classical music literature from the first words of the Latin translation of the text which begins with "Now dismiss...." When the old man took Jesus into his arms, he sang a song of praise and said, "*Sovereign Lord, as You have promised, You may now dismiss Your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel*" (Lk. 2:29-32).

There are several things that stand out in the song of Simeon. **First**, he sang about the promises of God. What the Lord promised, He did. God was faithful to keep His Word. In a day when politicians lie to us, when advertisers make false promises, when we begin to wonder if we can trust anyone at all, it is good to know we can count on God and He will be true to His Word. Some of us are struggling to trust God this Christmas? It seems like He has forgotten us? I'm sure Simeon wondered that at times, too, but God was faithful to His promise to Simeon, and He will be faithful to you as well.

Next, Simeon sang about the fact that he could now die in peace having seen the salvation of God with his own eyes. He personally witnessed God's greatest Christmas present ever in the little baby who would be the salvation for the world. Peace is sometimes hard to find at Christmas, isn't it? I pray each of us will find peace in our hearts this Christmas - the peace of God and peace with God.

Finally, Simeon sang about the light Jesus would be to the Gentiles and the glory Christ would be for His own people of Israel. Here we see the missionary message of the gospel hinted at in the lyrics of



Simeon's song. Christ was not only the Savior of the Jews; He was also the Savior of the world. The Good News is not something we can keep for ourselves; we must share it with others.

What's your favorite Christmas carol? Despite all the claims most people make about which carol is their favorite, I think that for many folks their favorite song at Christmas is the Rolling Stones' song, "I Can't Get No Satisfaction"! Is there any time of the year when dissatisfaction is more prevalent than at Christmastime? We feed our lust for something more, something better, something we didn't get, and our presents the day after Christmas seem few, small, and insignificant compared to others.

In contrast to all this is Simeon's song of praise and satisfaction. He can die in peace and he is satisfied, all because he had seen Jesus. If Christ was the only gift you received this Christmas, would that be enough for you? If Jesus was all you had, would you be satisfied?

III. Simeon's Prediction.

When Simeon finished his song, Mary and Joseph marveled at what was said about their baby, and the old man blessed the parents. But then he made a startling prediction, and he addressed his words specifically to Mary. He said, *"This child is destined to cause the falling and 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"* (2:34,35).

Simeon wasn't trying to be Scrooge or the Grinch who stole Christmas when he said these strong words to Mary. Rather, he was able to understand that this child would be a dividing line in human history, and the revolution He would bring would not be welcomed by everyone. Simeon said that Christ would be a sign which shall be spoken against, and the old man was one of the few to comprehend that not everyone would accept the message of salvation and not everyone would welcome the Messiah with joy. Simeon somehow understood that Jesus would be controversial and that some would accept it while others would reject it.

Philip Yancey writes that when the Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci went to China in the 16th century, he brought along with him samples of religious art to illustrate the Christian story for people who had never heard it before. The Chinese readily adopted portraits of the Virgin Mary holding her child, but when he showed them the paintings of the crucifixion and tried to explain that the God-child grew up only to be executed, the people reacted with revulsion and horror.ⁱⁱ

Philip writes, "As I thumbed through the stack of Christmas cards we received this year, I realize that we in Christian countries do much the same thing. We observe a mellow, domesticated holiday purged of any hint of scandal. Above all, we tend to eliminate from it any reminder of how the story that began at Bethlehem turned out at Calvary."

Simeon's prediction also involved Mary herself. He turned to her and said, *"And a sword will pierce you own soul, too"* (2:35). He made a prophesy that Mary's heart would break when she realized just what it would cost her Son to accomplish the salvation of the world. 33 years later Mary was with her boy, her firstborn, but this time she was with Him at the foot of a cross. She watched her little baby, now a grown man, die by Roman crucifixion as a payment for your sins and my sins and her sins. The shadow of the cross hovered over the holy family even at that first Christmas.

Conclusion.

Somehow Simeon sensed that though on the surface little had changed in the world, underneath everything had changed. Herod still ruled, Roman troops were still executing Jewish rebels, Jerusalem still overflowed with beggars. And yet a new force had arrived in the person of Jesus to undermine all the world's powers. Simeon had the great blessing to witness it for himself.



What special miracle does God want you to notice this Christmas? What little surprise will He bring your way that could very well change your life? Are you cultivating the character of Christ so that can have a purity of heart that will see it when it happens? Are you looking for the Lord to show up in unexpected ways? We must see with eyes of faith, or it may pass us by.

I close with this. Loren Eiseley wrote a book titled *In All the Strange Hours*. In it he tells a story of visiting with Professor Radnor, an astronomer who spent his nights on top of Mount Palomar in California peering into outer space through the great telescope that is on top of that mountain. Eiseley asked him, "Professor, what do you see out there? Stars? Is there anything new brewing in outer space?"

The Professor replied that what he was looking for the remains of a missing planet. He went on to explain that between the 5th and 6th planets there is cosmic dust. There is space enough between the two planets for a missing planet and that the cosmic dust would not be there if a planet had not at one time been in that space. It was once there, and now it is gone. At some time, it blew up, as all stars and planets eventually will.

Then Eiseley said to his friend the astronomer, "I never heard of a missing planet. Why is it that no one else ever found it? Why hasn't someone else seen it?"

Professor Radnor replied, "They weren't looking for it."ⁱⁱⁱ

Are you looking for Jesus this Christmas, my friend? Keep your eyes peeled. He may yet show up for you! Just ask Simeon. Amen.

ⁱTaken from *Today in the Word*, December 28, 1999. Source: Jim Singleton.

ⁱⁱCited in Philip Yancey's *The Jesus I Never Knew*, p. 33.

ⁱⁱⁱSource: Frank Harrington in a sermon he preached at Peachtree Presbyterian Church in Atlanta, GA on December 6, 1998. Shared with me by Jim Singleton.

