

What Simeon Saw: Lessons From a Satisfied Old Man

Luke 2:25-35

Mark Vroegop

25 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. 26 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. 27 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, 28 he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,

29 "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace,
according to your word;
30 for my eyes have seen your salvation
31 that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,
32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and for glory to your people Israel."

33 And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. 34 And Simeon 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 35 (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed" (Luke 2:25-35 ESV).

What would prompt you to say, "Okay, now I'm ready to die!" Because that is what Simon said. He was a satisfied old man. Luke uses the story of his life and meeting of the Christ-child to make a very important point for Theophilus, the Roman ruler for whom this book is written.

What is that point? Luke uses the story of Simeon (2:25-35) and Anna (2:36-38) to demonstrate that the Christ-child is the one for whom Israel had waited and longed for. Therefore, the ages of Simeon and Anna are very important. Luke wants to show that both of these people have been patiently waiting for the Messiah. Their patient waiting is now being fulfilled as Simeon and Anna both converge in temple area and meet the Messiah face to face.

The scene that Luke wants to highlight is more than just historical fulfillment. It seems that Luke wants to make this scene very personal for Simeon and Anna. I see this in Simeon's personal statement, "For my eyes have seen your salvation" (2:30), and from Luke's account of Anna's actions, "And coming in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for the redemption of Israel" (2:38).

Luke's point for Theophilus is that this Christ-child is the one that God-fearing, law-keeping, and faith-filled people looked for. Jesus is the one that they have been longing and looking for.

Therefore, if you could see Simeon in the temple courtyard holding the baby Jesus with his eyes lifted to the vast sky of Jerusalem you would see a satisfied old man! In fact, he is so satisfied that having held the Christ-child he is now ready to die!

To me, this is a powerful image and one that begs a very important question – “What did he see?” And that is what we are going to examine today: what did Simeon see when he looked into the face of the Messiah.

Let me first give you my thesis, and then try to show you three ways that I see this in the text.

Simeon’s Sight and Luke’s Point

I believe that Luke records this account to show Theophilus and all of us that Simeon saw the gospel – an attractive, broad, costly, and satisfying gospel. He saw the gospel clearly, and he was a satisfied man. He was satisfied with the gospel.

The story of Simeon is a reminder that this Christmas season is essentially about the far-surpassing joy that a personal relationship with Christ brings. This account is reminder to all of us that this day is not just about time with family or wonderful expressions of love. Rather, Christmas calls to remember that Jesus is not only the reason for the season, He is **only** reason for living or (in Simeon’s case) dying.

To be a follower of Christ means that we have declared that **nothing** is more important, lovely, attractive, and worthy than Jesus! That is what Simeon saw, and that is what all godly people should see – even to the point of death.

So, I’d like to call you to be like Simeon – a man supremely satisfied with a costly gospel. To have the kind of eyesight that Simeon had we need to see three things: 1) The treasure of a godly life, 2) The beauty of the gospel, and 3) The cost of following Christ.

The Treasure of a Godly Life (vv 25-28)

Central to Simeon’s spiritual eyesight was a deeply rooted godliness. His meeting of the Christ-child was not an anomaly or a spiritual aberration. Rather, it was the summit of his life-long experience with God.

Notice how the text describes him. We learn (vs 25) that he lived in Jerusalem. Simeon appears to be a normal Jewish man. He is not identified as a priest, or ruler. What distinguishes Simeon is not his position, but his godliness. Four characteristics are given here:

- He is described as **“righteous”** which means that he was considered a man full of God-honoring actions. The word is primarily focused towards one conduct with others. So Simeon was known for his godly conduct toward others.
- He is called **“devout.”** He was careful about his religious observances. He was a faithful temple goer which means that he regularly met with God.

- He was **“waiting for the consolation of Israel.”** He took the prophets at their word and was looking for the coming Messiah.
- **“The Holy Spirit was upon him.”** He was a man deeply influenced and controlled by the Spirit of God. There was something about him which indicated the special, manifest presence of the Spirit.

From an Old Testament perspective, Simeon was a model of godliness. He kept the law inwardly and outwardly, looked for the Messiah, and the very presence of God was in his life.

Verse 26 tells us that God had revealed to him that he would not see death until he had seen the Lord’s Christ. He would not die until he saw for himself the coming Messiah. What a gift that God had given him! And who better to give it to than a man who would fully appreciate it.

What impresses me about Simeon is the powerful mingling of righteousness, Spirit-empowerment, and faith to take God at His Word. Simeon’s righteous faith qualified him to see something incredibly special. Treasuring God at one level gave him eyesight to see something at another level. It reminds me of this New Testament passage:

10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. 11 Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, 12 waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! 13 But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. 14 Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace (2 Peter 3:10-14).

Simeon understood the treasure of a godly life. Oh to have the world know this about the followers of Christ. Oh to have people know that there is something different about us because of how satisfied we are in Christ. It will not make sense to them, and honestly it shouldn’t. In fact, people may even laugh at your Christ-centered satisfaction.

Several years ago I received a telemarketing call, and I did something I’ve never done before. I made the telemarketer laugh. I mean not just a chuckle, but a hearty laugh. The telemarketer called and asked me if I had received my car keys in the mail last week. I said that I had not. “Well,” she said, “I have good news. We have an extra set here at our office. All you need to do is come down to our service center to learn about our products, pick up your keys, and you will have chance to start a 2006 Chevy Blazer. If it starts, you get to keep the vehicle.” “Oh,” I said, “I really don’t like Chevy Blazers”. I was really trying to politely end the call. “Really?” she said. She changed strategies, “Well, how about \$15,000? We have a drawing for \$15,000 cash!” By now my food was getting cold so I said, “Yeah...I really wouldn’t like \$15,000 either.” And that was when we both started laughing. I really didn’t care about \$15,000 at that moment. I just want to eat and to be done with that call.

Wouldn't it be awesome if that was our view of life when it comes to the gospel? "Yeah, you know what I really don't need this job if you are going to make me do that." "Yeah, I know you'd probably leave your husband, but I'm going to believe that God can restore our marriage." "Yeah, I know that we could buy that, but we'd rather give our money away." "Yeah, I know that you are going to kill me, but I won't recant on my belief in Christ."

The Beauty of the Gospel (vv 29-32)

Mary and Joseph bring Jesus into the temple to dedicate Him forty days after his birth. Verses 22-24 tell us what is happening here.

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 23 (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord") 24 and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons" (Luke 2:22-24).

Leviticus 12:1-8 gave clear instructions that after the birth of a child a woman was ceremonially unclean. This season of uncleanness was terminated by the offering of a sacrifice (a lamb for a burnt offering and a pigeon or turtledove for a sin offering). The Law also allowed, in the cases of poverty, for two pigeons or turtledoves to be offered instead of a lamb.

So Mary and Joseph left Bethlehem, traveled the six miles up to the city of Jerusalem. Simeon finds them coming into the temple, takes the child in his arms, and offers a beautiful prayer of thanksgiving to God.

Simeon's prayer captures the beauty of the gospel:

1. The gospel brings hope.

He begins his praise to God with an expression of ultimate satisfaction in God and it is tied to the word peace: "**Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace,**" (v 29). Simeon is ready to die – he is at peace – because he has seen the future hope of Israel and the world.

2. The gospel is rooted in God's faithfulness

The peace that Simeon is talking about is linked to two phrases – "**according to your word**" and "**for my eyes have seen your salvation.**" Peace is not linked to an absence of conflict or pain, but to the assurance that God keeps His word. He is at peace and his heart is filled with hope because he knows that God has fulfilled His promise. Simeon is so satisfied in the beauty God's ability to keep His word.

3. The gospel is global

But the beauty is not limited here to Simeon's experience alone. Central to the beauty of what Simeon sees is the breadth of what all of this means: "**that you have prepared in the**

presence of all peoples.” God is being gracious to Israel, but Simeon knows that God’s grace is going to overflow the borders of this small nation.

4. The gospel is glorious news

Simeon knows that God’s target is not just Israel but all people. He expresses this so well in verse 32, **“a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.”** The small child that Simeon holds will be a light to the Gentiles. He will bring the revelation to non-Jewish people in order to bring Jews and Gentiles to God.

It was this little child who would live a sinless life, declare words of life, and then absorb the wrath of God so that the creator God and his people could be reunited. It was this little child who creates the means by which people separated by their sins can come back to their God. It was through this child that sin could permanently be forgiven.

Simeon does not know that years later Paul will write these words:

“11 Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands— 12 remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility” (Eph 2:11-14).

19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God (Eph 2:19)

What a beautiful picture! God is going global! As Paul put it in Ephesians 2:19 – no longer strangers or foreigners, but fellow citizens!

This is the gospel – full of hope, rooted in God’s faithfulness, spread to all people, and the most glorious news in all the world! As you celebrate this holiday, exchange gifts, enjoy days of rest, and time with family – I just want to remind you that this holiday is about the glory and the beauty of the gospel!

The Cost of Following Christ (v 33-35)

I love the balance that Simeon has – the kind balanced spiritual eyesight that we all need. Godly people are supremely satisfied with a costly gospel. You see, treasuring godliness and the worth of the gospel are tested when following Christ costs you something.

Mary and Joseph marvel at what Simeon says about him (v 33) and then he says something stunning to Mary:

“This child is appointed...” Simeon knew and Mary and Joseph were only beginning to fully understand that this little baby was part of massive plan determined even before the foundations of the earth (Eph 3:11, Heb 4:3, Rev 13:8).

Just ponder that for a moment with me: God appointed the future execution of son. Even the most unjustified, unfair, and evil event in human history was a part of God’s gracious plan? That is enormously comforting, especially if this Christmas is one that is filled with hard providence for you.

“For the fall and rising of many.” This phrase either means that many will be humbled and spiritually raised up because of him (like the story of the publican in Luke 18:9ff), or it means that Jesus will be a stone over which some will fall and perish while others are spiritual “risen up” by God’s power (see Luke 1:51-53).

“For a sign that is opposed.” This is clear. All men will not accept Jesus. He will, in fact, be rejected.

“A sword will pierce through your own soul also.” Simeon gets very personal here with Mary telling her that she will suffer greatly by the suffering of her son.

“The thoughts of many hearts will be revealed.” The thoughts of men’s hearts will be revealed **by** what they do with Christ. If they acknowledge Christ, then they must be humble and bend the knee to God as their creator. One’s response to Christ reveals the true condition of the heart.

Put all of that together and what you have is a very costly gospel. Granted it is glorious and attractive, but it is not safe. Simeon does not domesticate the gospel or the Messiah. He is a godly man who is satisfied with a gospel that is a beautiful and costly treasure.

And that is where we come to you and me.

- Is godliness a treasure to you?
- Do you see the gospel for the beauty that it is?
- Do you follow Christ even when it proves costly?
- Can you be godly through seasons where God makes you wait?
- Have you bent your knee and turned to Christ for the forgiveness of your sins?

Simeon saw the all-surpassing worth of the Messiah. He saw this baby as the reason for his godliness. He saw him as the beauty of God saying, “Promise Fulfilled.” He held him and knew that one day this baby would call people to choose between God and themselves.

Simeon got it and he saw it! May God give us the kind of spiritual eyesight to see it and lives to live it! Godly people are supremely satisfied and they celebrate a costly gospel.

© College Park Church

Permissions: You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce this material in any format provided that you do not alter the content in any way and do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction. Please include the following statement on any distributed copy: by Mark Vroegop. © College Park Church - Indianapolis, Indiana. www.yourchurch.com