

To Seek and To Save the Lost

The Testimony of Simeon

Luke 2:25-35

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Scripture

We are studying the life of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke in a sermon series I am calling, “To Seek and To Save the Lost.”

Luke described the birth of Jesus, which took place in a stable in Bethlehem. Then he told us about the shepherds visiting Jesus on the night of his birth.

Joseph and Mary continued to stay in Bethlehem after the birth of Jesus. Eight days after his birth, Jesus was circumcised and named “Jesus,” in accordance with the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb (2:21). Forty days after his birth, Mary, along with Joseph and Jesus, went to the temple for her purification and Jesus’ presentation to the Lord, as it is written in the Law of the Lord (2:22-24).

While they were in the temple precincts, Joseph and Mary and Jesus met two very godly people who gave an astounding testimony regarding Jesus. Today we are going to examine the testimony of Simeon, and next time we will examine the testimony of Anna.

Let’s read about the testimony of Simeon in Luke 2:25-35:

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)

Introduction

Most of us do not remember much about the Cold War. The Cold War is usually dated from 1945 to 1991, and was a state of political and military tension primarily between the United States and the former Soviet Union.

One of the most controversial episodes of the Cold War was the trial and execution of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg in 1953, who were convicted of spying for the Soviet Union against the United States.

Almost 50 years later the controversy was revived with the confession of a key witness who said that he lied in court to protect himself. That key witness turned out to be Ethel Rosenberg’s younger brother, David Greenglass, himself a convicted spy who spent 10 years in prison.

Greenglass said that he felt no remorse over his action that may have sent his sister to the electric chair. He said he gave false testimony to protect himself and his wife, and that he was encouraged by the prosecution to do so. He said, “I would not sacrifice my wife and my children for my sister.”

Greenglass believes he will be remembered by history as

“a spy that turned his family in.” But, he says, he does not care.¹

Telling lies in a court of law is a serious crime. Our legal system tries to ensure the accuracy of testimony so that the truth may be established.

Luke does a masterful job of presenting many eyewitnesses who testify about Jesus so that the truth may be established. Luke wants his readers—and us—to learn about Jesus’ true identity and mission.

In today’s text Luke introduces us to Simeon who testifies to the true identity and mission of Jesus.

Let us then analyze the testimony of Simeon in Luke 2:25-35.

Lesson

An analysis of the testimony of Simeon as set forth in Luke 2:25-35 will show us the true identity and mission of Jesus. In Luke 2:25-35 we learn about:

1. The Character of Simeon (2:25a)
2. The Expectation of Simeon (2:25b)
3. The Anointing of Simeon (2:25c-27)
4. The Song of Simeon (2:28-33)
5. The Prophecy of Simeon (2:34-35)

I. The Character of Simeon (2:25a)

First, we learn about the character of Simeon.

Luke began by telling us that **there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon** (2:25a). This is the only place in Scripture where this **Simeon** is mentioned. His name means “God has heard” (cf. Genesis 29:33). Actually, **Simeon** was a common name. A number of people in the Bible were named **Simeon**, such as, one of Jacob’s twelve sons (Genesis 34:25), an

¹ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/1695240.stm>.

ancestor of Jesus (Luke 3:30), one of the teachers in the church at Antioch (Acts 13:1), and one of the apostles, Simon Peter, whose Hebrew name was **Simeon** (Acts 15:14).

Then Luke said that **this man was righteous and devout** (2:25a). This is a wonderful description about the character of Simeon that is loaded with meaning.

To say that Simeon was **righteous** means that he, like Abraham (Genesis 15:6), had righteousness imputed to him (cf. 1:6; 14:14; Matthew 13:49; 25:46; Acts 10:22; Romans 1:17).

And to say that Simeon was **devout** means that he was “reverent toward God,” “God-fearing,” or “pious.” It conveys the idea of being careful to obey and honor God so as to lead an exemplary life before others.

To be **righteous** and **devout** simply means that Simeon was *justified* and *sanctified*. The two terms are really inseparable because, as John Calvin put it, “Christ, therefore, justifies no man without also sanctifying him.”² Simeon was declared **righteous** by God and, therefore, he was **devout** in the way he lived his life before God and the world.

Wouldn't that be a wonderful epitaph to put on your tombstone? **Righteous and devout**. That will only be true when you put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, and then live your life being careful to obey and honor God so as to lead an exemplary life before others.

II. The Expectation of Simeon (2:25b)

Second, we learn about the expectation of Simeon.

Luke tells us that Simeon was **waiting for the consolation of Israel** (2:25b). **Consolation** means, “comfort.”

Simeon cared deeply about the people of God, **Israel**. His concern was heightened by the distressing circumstances in

² John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 1997), III, 16, 1.

which the nation found itself at that time, chafing under the brutal occupation of the hated Roman Empire. This oppression caused the nation of **Israel** to long even more for the deliverance that was promised to them by God in the Old Testament.

This Old Testament promise was embodied in the Messiah, the anointed one sent by God to deliver his people from oppression. But the promised Deliverer would deliver his people from the oppression of *sin*. The deliverance would be spiritual rather than political. He would be **the consolation of Israel**.

The prophet Isaiah in particular emphasized the Messiah's role as **the consolation of Israel**. In Isaiah 40:1, he wrote, "Comfort, comfort my people, says your God." In verse 10, Isaiah identified the one who would bring comfort, that is, consolation, "Behold, *the Lord God* comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him." And in many other passages Isaiah emphasized that God will comfort his people (cf. 49:8-13; 51:3, 12; 52:9; 54:11; 57:18; 66:10-13).

Jesus actually identified himself as **the consolation of Israel** by quoting from Isaiah at the very beginning of his ministry. After Jesus' temptation in the wilderness, he began his ministry by going to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written in Isaiah 61:1-2, and read these words,

"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
because the Lord has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor;
he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and the opening of the prison to those who are
bound;
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor,

and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn."

Then Jesus rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.

And Jesus said to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (cf. Luke 4:16-21). He understood that he was **the consolation of Israel**.

The other prophets, such as Jeremiah (31:13), Ezekiel (14:22-23), and Zechariah (1:17), also spoke of God's promise of consolation and comfort for his people.

Simeon's expectation was consistent with the Old Testament promise that God would send **the consolation of Israel** through the coming Messiah.

III. The Anointing of Simeon (2:25c-27)

Third, we learn about the anointing of Simeon.

Luke said that **the Holy Spirit was upon him** (2:25c).

Some people think that the **Holy Spirit** only began his work in the lives of God's people on the Day of Pentecost. However, that is not true. All God's people were saved in the Old Testament in exactly the same way as they are saved in the New Testament: by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone (cf. Ephesians 2:8-9). And though Old Testament sinners did not yet know the name of Christ, every sinner, who is "dead in . . . trespasses and sins" (2:1), can only come to faith by the work of the **Holy Spirit**.

The **Holy Spirit** convicted people in the Old Testament of their sin, prompted repentance, enabled faith, and drew them to God. Apart from his work, no person in any age can ever be justified and sanctified.

There is, however, a new dimension to the work of the

Holy Spirit in the lives of God's people since the Day of Pentecost. In the Old Testament the **Holy Spirit** was *with* or **upon** believers. But now in the New Testament the **Holy Spirit** is *in* believers in an unprecedented way (cf. Ezekiel 36:26-27).

So, when Luke said that **the Holy Spirit was upon** Simeon, he was reporting the Spirit's pre-Pentecost empowering people to serve and speak for God (cf. Exodus 31:2-3; Numbers 11:25; 27:18; Judges 3:9-10; 11:29; 1 Samuel 16:13). Luke has already reported the Holy Spirit's filling of John the Baptist (1:15), Elizabeth (1:41), and Zechariah (1:67).

Luke then said in verse 26 that **it had been revealed to Simeon by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ** [that is, God's Messiah]. We are not told when or how the Holy Spirit revealed this to Simeon. Nevertheless, this revelation to Simeon must have encouraged him tremendously as he knew that he would see the consolation of Israel before he died.

Then, forty days after Jesus was born, Joseph and Mary brought him to the temple precincts. **And Simeon 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** (2:27), as we learned in the previous lesson, Simeon met Jesus. Luke does not tell us how they met. Nor does he tell us how Simeon knew that Jesus was the promised Deliverer, the Messiah, the consolation of Israel. Presumably, the Holy Spirit directed him to Jesus.

One of the great blessings of salvation for the Christian is the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. If you are a Christian, the Holy Spirit dwells in you. He is there to empower you, guide you, encourage you, discipline you, sustain you, and enable you to persevere to glory. Let us be attentive to the work of the Spirit in our lives. And the way that works is that the Spirit takes the word of God and applies it to our lives. So, study the word of God, and be attentive to the Spirit's application of

God's word to your life.

IV. The Song of Simeon (2:28-33)

Fourth, we learn about the song of Simeon.

Having met Joseph and Mary and Jesus in the temple precincts, Simeon **took Jesus up in his arms and blessed God** (2:28). He must have been overcome with joy as he realized that God's promise was indeed coming true. Deliverance was now coming to Israel, and he was holding the consolation of Israel, the promised Deliverer, the Messiah, in his arms.

Then, Simeon broke out in a song of praise. He said in verses 29-32:

**“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 peoples,
a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and for glory to your people Israel.”**

This song is known as Simeon's *Nunc Dimittis*, after the first words of the song in the Latin version of the Bible. It is actually the fifth of the five nativity songs recorded by Luke. The five songs are Elizabeth's *Benedicta* (1:42-45), Mary's *Magnificat* (1:46-55), Zechariah's *Benedictus* (1:68-79), the angels' *Gloria* (2:14), and Simeon's *Nunc Dimittis* (2:29-32).

Having seen the promise of God fulfilled in the infant Jesus, Simeon was content to **depart in peace, according to the word** that God had revealed to him through the Holy Spirit. With his own **eyes** he had seen God's **salvation** that he had **prepared in the presence of all peoples**. What joy, what delight, what blessing flooded his heart as he held the infant.

But, isn't this the experience of all believers? When we see Jesus by faith for the first time, are we not also filled with joy and delight and blessing?

Then Simeon sang that the promised deliverance would be **light for revelation to the Gentiles**, as well as **for glory to God's people Israel**. Here we have a clear statement that Jesus came to save not only the people of **Israel** but the **Gentiles** as well. In other words, the gospel is universal. It is universal not in the sense that all people will be saved but in the sense that people from "every tribe and language and people and nation" (Revelation 5:9) will be represented in heaven.

This is the good news of the gospel! Jesus is for all people! There is no cultural group or community for whom Jesus cannot be a Savior! No one ever needs to feel disenfranchised because Jesus came to save some from *all* people groups.

Is it any wonder then that **his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him (2:33)**?

V. The Prophecy of Simeon (2:34-35)

And finally, we learn about the prophecy of Simeon.

After he finished his song of praise, **Simeon blessed Joseph and Mary**. But then he **said directly to Mary**, Jesus' 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**" (2:34-35).

In his great mercy God addressed these words through Simeon to **Mary** so that she would prepare herself for what was to come. Apparently, Joseph would not be around to witness the hostility that would come to Jesus. In fact, after the incident at Passover, when Jesus was twelve years old, which we shall study in Luke 2:41-52, we never hear of Joseph again. Presumably, Joseph died before Jesus began his ministry.

Simeon told Mary that Jesus was **appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel**. In other words, Jesus was destined to be the determiner of people's destiny (cf. John 1:9-13). Later, Jesus himself said in Luke 12:51, "Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division."

The destiny of each person is determined by how they respond to Jesus. Those who believe in him go to heaven. Those who do not believe in him go to hell. That sounds harsh. But that is what the Bible teaches, and Simeon affirms that.

Moreover, Simeon told Mary that **a sword would pierce through her own soul also**. Here Simeon is alluding to the death of Jesus. Ultimately, God brings about salvation through the death of Jesus as he paid the penalty for sinners. And since Mary would be at the foot of the cross, her mother's soul would be excruciatingly pierced, as she would watch her son die.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the testimony of Simeon in Luke 2:25-35, we should believe his testimony.

Simeon testified that Jesus was indeed the promised Deliverer, the Messiah.

Simeon saw and held Jesus in his arms. And he believed that God had fulfilled his promise in sending the promised Deliverer.

But, do you know that we actually have more reason to believe that Jesus is the promised Deliverer than did Simeon? You see, we know about Jesus' perfect life. We know about his death. We know about his resurrection. We know about his ascension into heaven. And Simeon knew none of this.

Therefore, believe the testimony of Simeon that Jesus is the promised Deliverer from God sent to save us from our sin.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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PRAYER:

O Lord our God, we thank you for the testimony of Simeon. Thank you for his righteous and devout character. Thank you that he was so clear about waiting for the consolation of Israel, whom you promised to send to deliver people from their sins. Thank you for anointing Simeon so that he could indeed testify to what he had seen on that glorious day so long ago. Thank you for the song of Simeon, the *Nunc Dimittis*, that spoke of Jesus being not only for the Jews but also for all people everywhere. And thank you for the prophecy of Simeon that Jesus would be the one who determines the destiny of people.

O God, if there is anyone here today who does not know Jesus as Lord and Savior, will you give that person the gift of faith and repentance?

If you would like to go to heaven and you do not want to go to hell, ask God to give you faith and repentance.

And for all of this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

CHARGE:

Now, brothers and sisters, go and serve God by obeying him!