

# Who Cares about Consolation?

## The Glory of Christ part 3

Luke 2:25-30 12-26-10

Summary: Jesus is Savior (rescuer from God's wrath – something only He could do) and Comforter (the one Isaiah promised would bring an end to all judgment on Israel and dry all Israel's tears and be a light to the Gentiles. Simeon was fulfilled just seeing the baby because he was a huge fan of the kingdom. Gain joy by becoming a fan and watching to see the work of Christ in the Church.

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**Luke 2:21** 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"), **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."

**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 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." **36** There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, **37** and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. **38** Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem. **39** When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. **40** And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him.

## Introduction: You watch for what you care about

I do not know if you have been following the news lately, but I am sure you all heard by now what happened last Tuesday. A woman in California was burning a candle and noticed that the pile of

wax at the bottom looked like the Virgin Mary, and the very next day there was a woman in Ohio who saw the face of Jesus on a pistachio shell (although some of her co-workers thought it looked more like Freddy Krueger or George Washington). Anyway, as you can imagine as soon as I heard the news I went immediately to the Online Synod discussion forum on TreasuringGod.com so I could get in on the discussion. Imagine my shock when I got there and discovered there is not even a thread on that subject! It is as though this entire church is completely unaware of the wax blob in California and the nut in Ohio. How did you miss that?

We all take notice of different things based on our interest, don't we? You are probably not going to follow the stories of the blob and the nut because you are not interested in that kind of thing. Some of you know all about what is going on in Congress right now but do not have a clue about the latest twist in the storyline of the Days of Our Lives soap opera. Others are up to the minute on who is being traded where in the NBA but could not name one of the top ten pop singers right now. And if you are sitting there thinking "Who cares about Days of Our Lives?" or "Who cares about what Congress is doing?" or "Who cares about the nut in Ohio?" – let me ask you a question – Who cares about the Consolation of Israel? The answer to that question could mean the difference between you coming out the other side of this holiday season with greater joy than ever, or in a funk of depression.

This was going to be one Christmas sermon about Simeon and then back to our study of the Sermon on the Mount. But the passage is not cooperating with that plan. This passage is so rich with references to attributes of Christ; we are now in a mini-series on the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We have looked at three attributes so far – the light of Christ, humanity and Jewishness of Christ, and the crystal clear, unmistakable revelation of Christ. The fourth attribute is in verse 21.

## Savior

### The name "Jesus"

**Luke 2:21 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.**

That name is important. "Jesus" is the Greek translation of the name "Joshua."<sup>1</sup> Why did God want the Messiah to be named after Joshua? Well, Joshua was the man God chose to lead His people into the Promised Land in the Old Testament. And nothing could be more fitting than for Jesus to be named after him, because the whole point of the Promised Land was to serve as a picture of heaven. Joshua led God's people into the earthly Promised Land; and now this little baby is going to be the new Joshua, and He will lead God's people into the ultimate, eternal Promised Land.

Secondly, the name itself means "Yahweh saves," which is a perfect name for Jesus because that is what Jesus is – the salvation of God. In fact, look what Simeon says as soon as he sees the baby Jesus:

**29 "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. 30 For my eyes have seen your salvation**

### Salvation from God's wrath

Jesus is the salvation of God – but salvation from what? To be saved means to be rescued – but rescued from what danger? The answer might surprise you.

**Romans 5:9 Since we have now been justified by [Jesus'] blood, how much more shall we be**

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<sup>1</sup> Whenever that name appears in the New Testament, if the context points to the Old Testament character they translate it "Joshua," but if it is talking about the Lord they translate it "Jesus" – but it is exactly the same Greek word.

## **!saved from God's wrath through him**

The thing we need to be rescued from is the wrath of God over our sin.

### ***Jesus surrounded by pictures of sin***

Have you ever noticed how many reminders of sin surrounded the birth of Jesus? Verse 21 mentions His circumcision. That was a picture of sin. The cutting away of that skin was a picture of cutting away sin. That is why the Prophets told the people, "Circumcise your hearts." Then in verse 22

### **Luke 2:22 When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem**

The time of purification refers to the forty days that Mary was ceremonially unclean after giving birth. That is another picture of sin. All the ceremonial uncleanness codes in the Old Testament were given to teach the people about the effects of sin.

### **22 ... Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem ... 24 to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons."**

That is another picture of sin. In Leviticus 12, God required that whenever a woman gives birth she must bring a lamb and a pigeon as a sin offering and burnt offering. Or if she is too poor to afford a lamb, she can give two doves and two pigeons. Joseph and Mary were poor; the Magi had not come yet, so this is all they can afford.

So Jesus' birth is surrounded by reminders of mankind's need for a Redeemer. Now – every step of the way God safeguards us from stumbling into thinking that maybe Jesus was a just a regular sinner like the rest of us. Every time there is one of these pictures of sin God gives us a reminder that Jesus was not a sinner. Jesus needed to be surrounded by all the pictures of sin because He came to identify with sinners. So yes, Jesus was circumcised. But lest anyone get confused about that, the night He was born God lit up the entire sky with an army of angels singing His praises. And yes, Jesus' mother was rendered ceremonially unclean as a result of giving birth to Him and had to offer a sin offering. But lest anyone get confused about that, God sent a prophet and a prophetess into the Temple that day to speak about how this baby is nothing less than the very salvation of God and Redeemer of all mankind." Later on Jesus would be baptized with John's baptism of repentance. But lest anyone assume Jesus did that because He needed to repent of sin, the heavens cracked open and the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus visibly and God the Father spoke audibly from heaven saying this is His Son. Jesus was surrounded by all the same pictures of the need for salvation as the rest of humanity, but God guarded us every step of the way from the possibility of stumbling into thinking He was Himself a sinner. It is impossible to be confused about whether Jesus was just a regular man unless it is a willful confusion – the kind of confusion that comes from a heart that refuses to believe the truth even when it is crystal clear.

### ***Only Jesus can rescue from the calamity of God's wrath***

There is no doubt about it – Jesus is perfect, spotless, and sinless. But He was born right into all the pictures of sin God had placed in the Law in order to alert us to the desperate condition He came to save us from – the wrath of God over sin. All human beings have sinned against God, and have provoked His wrath. Think about that. Think about what an unthinkable calamity it is to have God coming after you in furious anger to carry out perfect justice. If you were being attacked by a mugger, another person might be able to rescue you. If you were being attacked by a lion, it would take more – a gun or something. If you were being attacked by one hundred Special Forces soldiers, it would really

take a lot to save you. But what if the threat facing you is the wrath of Almighty God? Where are you going to hide? Jonah tried getting on a boat and paddling away from the God who holds the ocean in the palm of his hand. God's wrath is the ultimate bunker-buster – no created shelter can save you from His fury. The wrath of God is more powerful than all created things combined. Only someone with as much power as God could possibly rescue you from God's wrath. It would have to be someone big enough and powerful enough to absorb all divine wrath in your place. There is only one Person who is that big and powerful. And thankfully, He is not only big and powerful, but also kind and loving and gracious enough to be willing to lay down His own life to absorb the wrath and punishment we deserve. That is why it is only through Jesus Christ that a person can be saved.

**Acts 4:12 Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men .by which we must be saved**

**John 14:6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father ".except through me**

There is no salvation apart from Jesus. "But what if someone has never heard of Jesus? Can they .be saved?" No

**Romans 10:13 "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." 14 How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?**

They cannot. No one can be saved apart from placing their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ because He is the only one who has died for their sins. If you do not know Christ then your sins are not paid .for, so you have to pay for your own sins in hell

Now, please do not take all that to mean God the Father is the angry one and Jesus is the kinder, more merciful one. God the Father is every bit as gentle and loving and merciful as Jesus. And God the Son has every bit as much wrath as God the Father. The reason we need Jesus to save us from the wrath of God is because even though the Father is very eager to forgive us, he wants all of His kindness to us to come as a favor to His Son, so His Son might be supremely honored. And also .because in order to preserve justice the punishment had to be poured out on man, and Jesus is man

Do you want to gaze upon the glory of God? Let the eyes of your soul gaze upon this – that you and I were in the most dire, most horrifying situation that it is possible to be in. Worse than any torture chamber, worse than any calamity you can imagine – worse than anything you have ever seen in a horror movie. God's mighty arm was lifted and ready to mete out infinite punishment on us. The fury was so extreme that nothing could shelter us or protect us even for a few seconds. Only one person was strong enough to save us and *He did* Do not ever let the word "Savior" become hollow. It is a ! staggering, blinding ray of Christ's glory that should shake us to the core if we catch even a glimpse of .it

## Comforter

**What he was watching for (the end of judgment)**

If I had to guess Jesus' favorite book of the Bible – based on His quotations I would have to go with Deuteronomy. He was always quoting Deuteronomy. And if I had to take a stab at Simeon's favorite book, it is no contest – Isaiah, hands down. Everything Simeon says comes right out of the book of Isaiah.

Simeon is introduced to us in verse 25 as one who was **waiting for the consolation of Israel.**

Who cares about the consolation of Israel? Simeon. It is all he lived for. That word **consolation** means comfort – like the comfort a loving father gives his child after a hard spanking. When the discipline is all over, and now it is time to restore closeness and so the parent consoles the child – that is what his word is referring to. And that is really a good summary of the entire book of Isaiah. Isaiah has two major sections. The first half of the book (ch.1-39) is known as The Book of Judgment. And the second half (40-66) is known as The Book of Consolation. God threatens judgment then promises consolation (comfort) after the punishment is over – that is the book of Isaiah. And if you read the book it is not hard to figure out why everyone refers to that second half as The Book of Comfort. After thirty-nine chapters of judgment, Isaiah jumps ahead in time to the day when it will all be over.

**Isaiah 40:1 Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. 2 Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.**

“The punishment is all over now, and it is time for comfort.” And you see that word “comfort” again and again and again throughout the rest of the book.

**Isaiah 49:13 Shout for joy, O heavens; rejoice, O earth; burst into song, O mountains! For the Lord comforts his people and will have compassion on his afflicted ones.**

**Isaiah 51:12 I, even I, am he who comforts you.**

**Isaiah 51:19 These double calamities have come upon you-- who can comfort you?-- ruin and destruction, famine and sword-- who can console you? ... 22 This is what your Sovereign Lord says, your God, who defends his people: "See, I have taken out of your hand the cup that made you stagger; from that cup, the goblet of my wrath, you will never drink again.**

When this comfort comes, there will never be judgment again.

### ***Through the Messiah***

But how is that comfort going to come? Answer – it will come through a man – a man Isaiah calls The Servant of the LORD. There is going to be a man who is descended from David who will bear Israel’s sin, take the punishment on Himself, and bring peace between God and His people. That is all spelled out in detail in chapter 53. That is the Messiah. And in chapter 61, the Messiah Himself speaks and tells about this comfort He will bring:

**Isaiah 61:1 The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, 2 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, 3 and provide for those who grieve in Zion-- to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.**

So the comfort would come through the Messiah, and so the Jews even to this day refer to the Messiah as The Comforter. The Hebrew word for comfort in Isaiah is NACHEM, and so their name for the Messiah is MENACHEM – “The Comforter.” When I was about 10 years old, I had a buddy who nicknamed me Sadat. And I called him Begin. We came up with those nicknames because it was during the time of the Camp David accords when the leaders of Egypt and Israel - Sadat and Begin, were having their talks. For some reason those names stuck out for us when we overheard the news as little fourth graders. The reason I mention that is to draw your attention to Begin’s first name –

Menachem. He was named after the Messiah. That is a favorite name for the Jews because one of the chief roles of the Messiah is to come and bring all of God's judgments against Israel to a close and dry the tears of the Jewish people, and bring them comfort and consolation like a father comforting the child after a spanking.

### *Not fulfilled in OT times*

OK, so with all that as background let's go back to Luke 2. When Luke says Simeon was looking for the consolation of Israel and uses that exact same word translated "comfort" all through the Book of Comfort (the second half of Isaiah) – everyone who knew the Bible at all would immediately know what he is talking about. Simeon's whole life was devoted to waiting for that second half of Isaiah to be fulfilled.

Now, there are a lot of commentators who have suggested that all those promises of restoration in Isaiah were fulfilled when the Jews returned from captivity and came back into the land of Israel. But if that is the case, what are you going to do with Simeon – who is still waiting for that comfort to arrive even at the time of Jesus? What kind of blockhead spends his entire life at a bus stop waiting for a bus that already came? The reason Simeon was still waiting and watching was because he was not a Preterist. He did not believe the prophecy had already been fulfilled. When the Jews came back into the land that was a partial fulfillment of those promises, but that did not put an end to all judgment and punishment from God on the Jewish people. That was not the end of all Jewish tears by any stretch. That was obvious to the Jews, so they were still looking for the fulfillment. And when the Holy Spirit, through the pen of Luke, speaks about Simeon He doesn't say, "This poor, pathetic, mixed up old man was still looking for the consolation of Israel – what a moron." No, the fact that he was looking for the consolation of Israel is one of Simeon's chief credentials that makes him such a godly man.

### *Includes the Gentiles*

He was watching for the MENACHEM to arrive, and that day in the Temple when he saw the baby Jesus, the Holy Spirit revealed that this was the one. The great Comforter he had spent his life watching for he now held in his arms. But then Simeon destroys any shot he had at winning any popularity contests in Israel because first he announces that this child is the one who will bring the consolation of Israel, but then he says this:

**Luke 2:30 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**

That is, it did not fit the popular eschatology. The Jews thought the Comforter would come and bring comfort by bringing the hammer down on the Gentiles. The Gentiles had always oppressed Israel and had been the tool God used to punish Israel, so the Jews imagined the main way God would bring comfort and end the punishment of Israel would be by sending the Messiah as a military leader who would give them final victory over those wicked, unclean, vicious Gentiles who have always persecuted and slaughtered the Jewish people.

When Jesus began His public ministry, when He preached His very first sermon in His home town in the synagogue, guess what text He preached from – Isaiah 61 – (**The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor...**) – that passage in Isaiah where the Messiah Himself speaks about His own ministry of bringing that comfort. He read it and said **Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing** (Lk.4:21). All your life you have waited for the Comforter, the MENACHEM to come and bring an end to all divine judgment on Israel – you have been waiting for Him to arrive – you are looking at Him.

Sometimes people misread Luke 4 and say that when Jesus made that claim to be the Messiah the people became angry and tried to throw him off a cliff. That is not what happened. When Jesus made the claim that He was the MENACHEM who would bring comfort to Israel, the people loved it. They

were thrilled. What made it turn ugly is when Jesus kept preaching and started talking about Gentiles being in on that comfort and blessing. That is what ignited their murderous rage and turned them into a lynch mob. But if they had read Isaiah more carefully they would have already known that God's plan was to include Gentiles. You see that toward the end – especially in the final chapter. Here is how the book of Isaiah ends:

**Isaiah 66:10 Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad for her, all you who love her...**

Instead of calling Israel to rejoice, God is calling other people – Gentiles who love Israel to rejoice. Why? Why should the Gentiles who love Israel rejoice?

**10 ... rejoice greatly with her, all you who mourn over her. 11 For you will nurse and be satisfied at her comforting breasts; you will drink deeply and delight in her overflowing abundance." 12 ... you will nurse and be carried on her arm and bounced on her knees. 13 As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you; and you will be comforted**

The picture is of Gentile nations being consoled and comforted by God through Israel. And that is happening now through Jesus Christ, who is the ultimate Israel.

**Gaining joy from the progress of the kingdom**

***Seeing baby Jesus was enough***

If you are a parent you probably know what it is like to guard your children from setting their expectations too high and then being disappointed. You do not want them thinking they are getting a pony for Christmas – when you got them some legos or something. You do not want them to live their lives fully expecting that they will be a professional baseball player if they are not any good at baseball. Can you imagine Simeon's parents?

“What do you want, Simeon?”

“Oh, I just want the end of all war and all suffering, and I'd like to personally see the MENACHEM, the Comforter, the Messiah who will come and permanently dry all the tears of the people of Israel and bring everlasting and ever-increasing joy to the Jewish people and through the Jews to all the nations. No, just let me see the fulfillment of the second half of Isaiah before I die – that's all I need.”

Simeon has the most ridiculous bucket list anyone has ever had. And he was looking for literal fulfillments too – nothing that had ever happened in history and nothing that had ever happened in his lifetime was enough. He wanted the real thing. That is Simeon's bucket list. And once he holds baby Jesus in his arms, he says,

**Luke 2:29 "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. 30 For my eyes have seen your salvation**

**Ecclesiastes 1:8 The eye never has enough of seeing**

Usually that is true, but not in this case. Simeon's eyes had seen enough. Simeon says, “Now that my eyes have seen this, let them be closed. If this is the last sight I ever see that will be just fine.

***Caring about God's kingdom purposes***

He is so happy – why? What does he personally get out of this? The Messiah is here, the one who will bring about the consolation of Israel and the end of punishment on the Jews has been born, the one who will ultimately bring about the redemption of God's people has arrived – but what immediate benefit comes to Simeon? What benefit does Simeon get from a 6-week-old Messiah? Sure He will do

all kinds of wonderful things, but He has not done any of them yet. If Simeon lives to see tomorrow or next week or next month – what will be different in his life? He will still be paying taxes to the same Roman government, living under the same wicked rulers of Israel, he will still have all the same physical problems he had before, all the same financial struggles, all the same family troubles – nothing is really going to be any different in his life. So what is making him so happy?

The answer is very simple – he was a huge fan of the kingdom of God. Let me ask you this – why is a Denver Bronco fan happy on the Monday morning after a big win? Or depressed on the Monday following a really bad loss? If your team wins a game, or gets the #1 draft pick and drafts the greatest player in the world – how is your life any different the next day? It isn't. If you are a fan, you are happy because something you care a lot about went well. Progress was made toward the goal of getting to the Superbowl or whatever.

That is a function of love. That is what love does – it takes your attention off yourself and moves it outward., so that your affections will rise or fall with what happens to that object of your love. And if the object of your love is a sports team, you will be happy or sad based on what happens to them. If the object of your love is your children, you will be happy or sad based on what happens with them. Your child brings home straight A's, or takes the first place trophy in something – that makes you happy even though it does nothing to change your financial situation or your job or your health or anything like that. You are happy not because your life changed, but simply because something went well for the object of your love.

Well, the great object of Simeon's love was God. Simeon loved God, so nothing mattered more to Simeon than God's people and God's kingdom and God's purposes and the outworking of God's perfect plan – especially His plan of redemption in bringing comfort to His people. Simeon cared so much about the consolation of Israel, and the fulfillment of the promises in Isaiah – God's purposes meant so much to him, that to see this massive step in the unfolding of God's purposes – to see God doing His thing and carrying out His plan – that meant more to Simeon than anything that might have happened in his own temporal circumstances.

### ***Become a fan***

How can you enjoy Christ as the consolation of Israel this holiday season? By becoming a fan of the kingdom of God. The only way to have the joy of Simeon is to have the expectation of Simeon. You will not delight in seeing the salvation of God unless you are eagerly watching for it. If we are not eagerly watching to see the movements of the hand of God in His kingdom then we will be like all the hundreds of other people who were in the Temple that day, and walked right past the Messiah Himself and did not have a clue. Simeon when home rejoicing and singing, and they went home and complained about how their new tunic makes them look fat. Simeon goes from that place on cloud nine and all the rest of the people go home grumbling about how nothing good ever happens in the Temple anymore.

The people who cannot see anything good happening in the Church today – maybe they do not see it because they are not watching for it. We look at the Church and we grieve over the things that are not as they should be. I get that. There is a huge amount that is not what it should be, and that is worthy of our distress and sorrow and even anger. But if what you feel when you look at the Bride of Christ in the world today is mostly disgust or anger or disapproval, you are blind. There is a lot more good than bad.

### ***Reasons to rejoice over what God is doing in the Church***

If just seeing the baby Jesus was enough to make Simeon think his entire life's desire was fulfilled, imagine the joy he would have if he got to see what we see? Imagine if he caught a glimpse of all the miracles Jesus would do years later. Imagine if he saw Jesus' compassion. Imagine if he saw the unfolding of God's plan of redemption with the cross and the resurrection and the ascension. Imagine if he had lived to see the proliferation of the gospel around the world! Simeon got to see the



world's greatest draft pick, but we get to see Him do His thing. We are watching the Superbowl and our team is up by a whole bunch of touchdowns. Jesus said His kingdom on earth would be like a tiny mustard seed that grew into a huge tree. Christianity started with a little group of one hundred twenty Jews gathered in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost. Now look at it. How many millions around the globe have heard the truth of the gospel in the past two thousand years?

And look at what the Body of Christ is doing in the world today. Is it true that most churches are bad? Yes. Most churches are terrible. But even if only one church out of a hundred is faithful to the gospel – that is one percent. That is still a lot of churches - thousands of faithful churches just in the United States alone – and no doubt one hundred times that many around the world. And when I look at all the amazing things God is doing just in this one, little church (Agape) – and I try to multiply that out times all the faithful churches around the world – it blows my mind. It blows my mind when I just think about what God is doing here. So many of you are ministering to one another. Discouraged people receiving encouragement. Weak people being strengthened. People who are despised by the culture but who find love and acceptance here. Gifts being given to those in need. Compassion, caring, instruction, reproof, rebuke, prayer for one another, love. Hearts being lifted up to God in unanimous praise. People sitting under the teaching of God's Word with eager, hungry hearts. Children being raised in the fear and instruction of the Lord. Missionaries being sent out. Evangelism at home and work and school. Salt and light in this city. People laying down their lives to serve those the Lord loves because the Lord loves them. And all of it to honor the Lord Jesus Christ.

And all that is happening in thousands and thousands of churches all over the globe. When you think of all the Christians everywhere in the world using their spiritual gifts – being used by the Holy Spirit to accomplish His purposes. I don't know what the second-largest organization in the world is, but whatever it is, it is dwarfed by the Church. Why is all that happening? What is it that is causing all that to take place? Is it just the natural, inevitable way that human beings will just tend to behave? Not hardly. All those things that are happening through the Church around the world are happening because the Consolation of Israel, the Lord Jesus Christ, is *causing* them to happen. He is working in His Church and orchestrating all those things. He is carrying out His work as the Comforter.

Is that work completed? No – God's judgment on the nation of Israel is not completed yet. The work will not be completed until all the promises of Isaiah are fulfilled and the Jews look upon the one they pierced and mourn and say, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord" and all Israel is saved. Then Jesus will return and eliminate evil altogether and bring full, complete, everlasting comfort to all His people.

That is what the end will look like. Simeon saw the beginning. What we are watching right now is the middle. The things the Lord is doing right now through His Church are spectacular. They are stunning. They are wonderful beyond words. So if you are a big fan of the Church, what do you have to be depressed about? Even if your finances are a mess, or you have some hard relationships, or your health is failing – what is that compared to the amazing things God is doing in His kingdom?

If you want to enjoy the Lord Jesus Christ over the holidays this year, immerse yourself in all that Scripture says about God's kingdom and purposes and all He is doing through the Church. So much of what He is doing is invisible. You cannot even know about it unless you read about it in His Word. When we suffer, it is good to take some time to think about what Scripture says about that suffering. That is a good thing to do – but sometimes an even better thing to do is to simply turn your attention away from yourself and your own suffering and think about the things God is doing. Place your hope .in God and His kingdom and promises No one who has ever hoped in God's Word has ever been disappointed. Who cares about the consolation of Israel? Whoever it is, they will be the most joyful people around as they watch the unfolding of all those things that Simeon had only in promise form.

**Benediction: 51:12 "I, even I, am he who comforts you. Who are you that you fear mortal men, the sons of men, who are but grass, 13 that you forget the Lord your Maker, who stretched out**

**the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth, ... 21 Therefore hear this, you afflicted one, ...  
22 This is what your Sovereign Lord says, your God, who defends his people: "See, I have taken  
out of your hand the cup that made you stagger; from that cup, the goblet of my wrath, you will  
never drink again.**