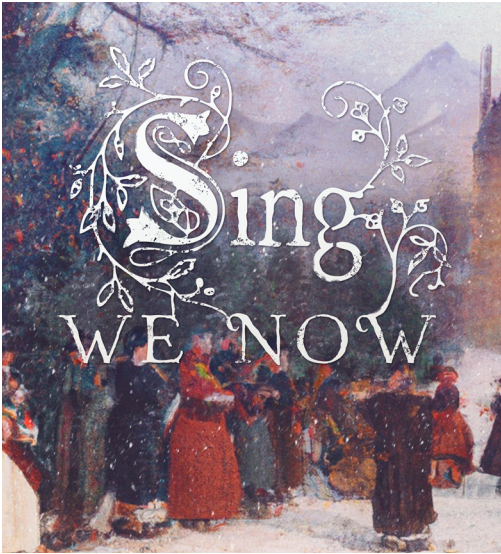




Sermon Growth Guide

December 17, 2023

Simeon's Song



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Sing We Now - Simeon's Song

Luke 2:25-35

Key Verse: Luke 2:29

“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace”

Big Idea: The faithful love of God for His wayward children is the source for loving one another.

Foundations

Simeon's Song is the third and last song in what are called *The Christmas Canticles*. Mary, the one chosen to bear Jesus into the world sings of what her child will do in bringing about the justice of God's Kingdom. Zechariah, a priest, sings with hope of the fulfillment of God's promise. He praises God that the son given to him will proclaim the good news of life, light, and peace in the coming Messiah.

Now Simeon, an elderly, ordinary man who lives in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, heads to the Temple at the same time Mary and Joseph are there to present Jesus according to the law. He sees Jesus and takes Him into his arms, recognizing that this little baby that no one else has noticed is the salvation that has been promised by God.

Simeon, Like Mary and Zechariah, sings with words from the Old Testament, especially Isaiah. Those words had been passed down to them over centuries. Some had lost hope that God would do what He promised. Some, like the Zealots, tried to force God's hand. Others, like Simeon, trusted God to work in His time.

Guided by and filled with the Holy Spirit, Simeon is able to see Jesus as the Promised Savior. He hasn't seen the ministry of Jesus unfold yet, but he knew that what and who he has seen is enough. He is at peace.

Understanding God's Word

Read together Luke 2: 25-35

In verses 34-35, Simeon speaks directly to Mary and tells her that her son, Jesus, will be a cause of division among many and that “a sword will pierce” her heart. This shatters the Christmas card nativity scene we had witnessed before. The salvation that Jesus brings will be messy.

People, including Mary herself, will have to decide to believe in Jesus, trusting Him alone for salvation. In families, communities, and even nations, Jesus will be both welcomed and opposed. Why do you think that Simeon's Song of peace is countered by Simeon's words of spiritual warfare and division?

Applying God's Word

You will notice the emphasis on the Holy Spirit in this passage. In three verses (25-27) the Holy Spirit's work in Simeon's life is mentioned. In his sermon, Pastor Tim said, “Breathe in the Spirit of God through the Word, through worship, through prayer.” How do each of those practices lead you to greater immersion into the Holy Spirit?

Witnessing God's Word

Simeon's Song was public. How can we sing a song of salvation so that others can hear about Jesus, their only hope?

In the Army a Soldier at Basic Training memorizes three general orders to always obey no matter what. The first one is this: "First General Order, I will guard everything within the limits of my post and quit my post only when properly relieved." Now, for a chaplain like me, that might mean waiting ten minutes for the guy who's running late, but you can imagine situations where that has meant a whole lot more. Dismissed. Relieved. Your duty is finished. That's our story today. That's Simeon. Simeon said, "Now that you are here, now that I see you, I am dismissed from my post." I wonder where Simeon did Basic.

On April 18, 1971, a man named John Stevens took up a post right here. How many of you were there? Dr. Stevens became Senior Pastor of First Pres, a post he held for 34 years of faithful service. If you didn't know Dr. Stevens, just know this is the guy who pastored this church through its healthiest season of growth since it began and, in many ways, led us to become what we are today. Truly. The Worship Center is the first floor of a building called "Stevens Hall." His ministry impact was enormous as through his faithful preaching and teaching of the Word he watched the Lord build a patch of the Kingdom right here. He was properly relieved when Jim Singleton came and preached a final sermon on Easter in 2005, but he was truly dismissed when he passed into the arms of Jesus on December 2.

Sing We Now. We are studying the songs of Christmas. **Simeon's Song** is sung sometimes at Vespers or Evensong, evening services at the end of the day, or at memorials. "Now you dismiss me. Now I am relieved of my post." Have you ever attended a memorial service for a fallen police officer? It is very moving. An officer calls, "Officer so-and-so." Silence. A second time, silence. Then the third time, "Officer so-and-so, end of watch." Simeon's Song is called the Nunc Dimittis, "now you dismiss me."

Simeon kept watch. Simeon kept post. He waited and watched for the arrival of the Savior, the Messiah. Then he saw it. So, actually, this is a song of satisfaction, not just dismissal. This is a song of fulfillment. If Mary's song is a song for rebels (we Christians don't play by the same rules as this world), and Zechariah's song is a song of hope, this is a satisfaction song.

Are you happy? Are you satisfied? What is that gnawing need that never seems to get filled, the unquiet hunger, the thirst you can never quench? Christmas has a way of exacerbating these things. It aggravates our feelings of lack, emphasizing what is missing. But that is an absolute betrayal of Christmas. It's a twisted, backward, un-Christmas, isn't it? Bizarro-Christmas. We have been given a gift, the greatest gift of all, Jesus, God's own Son, to be our everlasting Savior and Lord! And we are singing the songs of lack, singing the songs of bitter absence. What would it take to change that song? To stop singing "I wish I had," or "I'll never get," or "never enough," and start singing "God has provided for me," "God, my Father, has given me all"? Wouldn't that be a better song to sing this week?

We are cheating today looking at a song that technically comes after the birth of Jesus. "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 on him." (Luke 2:25) Simeon was not a priest or a prophet; he was not a minister or a pastor or a theologian or a king. Here is just an average guy, but a guy who loved the Lord and submitted to the Holy Spirit. This is a testimony for all of us. You too, by following the Lord and submitting to the impulse of the Holy Spirit, can see amazing things unfold before your eyes by the hand of God. "It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts."



(Luke 2:26-27) His hope, his deepest longing, was to see God's Messiah, to lay his eyes on God's Christ, just as the Spirit whispered in his heart that one day he would. You can imagine how he held onto that inspiration. Did his friends think he was off kilter? Did his wife, if he had one, think he was a little imbalanced? "I'm going to the Temple, honey." "You are? Again?" "Yep. I'm going to see the Messiah one day. The Holy Spirit told me." Obedience to the Spirit of the Lord pays off. It's worth it.

Now, somebody has been mentioned three times already. The Holy Spirit. All the songs we have studied say the same thing, the Holy Spirit inspired them. Mary and Elizabeth were filled with the Holy Spirit. John the Baptist's father, "His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied." (Luke 1:67) Now Simeon. He is so faithful and near to God and submitted to the Holy Spirit that he is known for it. The Holy Spirit was on him. It was the Holy Spirit that told him to wait and watch, one day he would see the Christ. It was the Holy Spirit that "moved him" it says, moved him to go to the Temple that day. No coincidence. He got to intersect with Jesus because he obeyed the impulse of the Spirit. Then the Holy Spirit filled up his heart and mind with this song. Are you filled with the Holy Spirit? We are running around trying to do the Christian life without letting the Holy Spirit fill us up.

Did you catch the new Snoopy balloon at the Thanksgiving Day parade. His hat popped a hole. They started calling it Droopy Snoopy. That's us sometimes. It's me sometimes. I'm so empty of the Holy Spirit I can't even see where I'm going. I just go where I'm towed. Let the Spirit fill you up. Take a breath. Breath in the Spirit of God, through Word, through worship, and through prayer.

"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,

saying:" (Luke 2:27-28) The word here is "blessed." Simeon blessed God. The reason I quibble is that the exact same word is used later when Simeon blessed Mary and Joseph. Simeon blessed God. Can you picture this? Joseph and Mary took Jesus to the Temple for circumcision on the eighth day, according to the law. They named Him just as they were told. They offered the sacrifices according to the law. Jesus came not to abolish the law but to fulfill the law. And Simeon is there, an ordinary man, who by the Spirit of God knows that this child is the Messiah he's been waiting to see. So, he takes Him in his arms. Simeon holds the baby Jesus and blesses Him. Ordinary Simeon looks down on Jesus' face and "blesses God." Do you see?

Now, what is better than holding a baby? Is your heart ever fuller than when you hold an infant in your arms? What if that baby was God? Would you sing a song about all the stuff you wish you had but don't think you'll get? Or would you sing a song of satisfaction, fullness, and gratitude? "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation." (Luke 2:29-30) Full. An empty promise is heartache, but a promise fulfilled is heart full. There's a proverb for that: "Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life." (Proverbs 13:12 RSV) "I can go in peace now, Lord. I have it all. I can die happy. This, Jesus, is all I needed to see."

Now, Simeon doesn't say, "I have seen baby Jesus," or "I have seen the God-child." Simeon says, "For my eyes have seen your salvation." To look on the face of Jesus is to see salvation incarnate, salvation embodied, salvation itself. Look at all the synonyms, the names of Jesus running through this passage. Verse 25, Simeon "...was waiting for the consolation of Israel." (Luke 2:25) "It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah."



(Luke 2:26) The very Christ of God. Verse 30 again, “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.” (Luke 2:30-32) These are all the same guy, the same child he holds. The light, the glory, the consolation, the salvation, the Messiah! It’s Jesus.

“The child’s father and mother marveled at what was said about him.” (Luke 2:33) There seems to be a lot of that going around. “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, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.’” (Luke 2:34-35) It’s not all sweetness and light. In the warm light of the nativity, the shadow of the cross lies over the cradle. Jesus will bring all who meet Him to a place of decision. Jesus doesn’t stand at the crossroads; Jesus is the crossroads. When He presents Himself, you must decide to follow or to turn away. The falling and rising of many. The thoughts of hearts revealed. And, dear Mary, a sword will pierce your heart, for this child, your child, is not yours alone, but has come to be the saving sacrifice, the bread of life, for all sinners who turn to Him for grace. I love that Simeon blessed Mary and Joseph. Who can you bless today? Bless God, then turn and bless those around you. Be a blessing. Lay a blessing on your family and friends, on your neighbors and city, lay a blessing in the name of Jesus.

Which song are you singing? Are you singing “never enough”? Are you singing sad songs of lack all about what your life is missing that you’ll never get? What would it take to change that song? Jesus came, Jesus died for us, Jesus rose again from the dead. Now when we come to Him, or when He comes to us, we put our faith in Him and experience the fullness of His presence

through the power of the Holy Spirit. Do you have any idea how often the Bible talks about the Holy Spirit? Every time someone is baptized for one thing. In the new covenant, baptism replaces circumcision, the ceremony Simeon was present for on this day. Jesus knew we need the Holy Spirit. At the end of this gospel, the very last thing Jesus says is: “I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.” (Luke 24:49) The Holy Spirit. Jesus wants us to have it. His presence filling us up, animating us, moving us. How obedient are you to the Holy Spirit? We should be like the sails of a ship turning whatever direction it blows.

What has the power to change my song? To make me stop singing “never enough” and start singing “God has provided for me”? To stop singing “God never” and start singing, “For my eyes have seen your salvation.” (Luke 2:30) It is the same power by which my heart can become a home for the Holy Spirit. How is it that God’s holiness can dwell inside my (I’m just being honest here) rotten and selfish heart? Over the cradle lies the shadow of the cross. Jesus said, “I thirst.” He went empty so we could know fullness. Jesus paid the penalty for our sins so we could receive the Holy Spirit. How can holiness reside in me? Only by the blood sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Jesus is enough to change our songs.

Let’s pray, as we have been doing, inviting a new relationship with Jesus. Follow after me please, “Lord Jesus Christ, I have been singing the wrong songs; I sing about emptiness when you bring fullness; you came and died for me so I could be forgiven; you opened heaven for me; teach me to sing a new song; and give me faith to follow you. In Jesus’ name. Amen.”

