

Luke

Departing In Peace
Luke 2:25-30

With Study Questions

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And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name *was* Simeon, and this man *was* just 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 So he came by 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 (Luke 2:25-30).

Introduction

When I first took the pulpit of this church, the previous pastor invited me to a Bible study he was leading at a nearby retirement home. He led a study which consisted mainly of widows. As we walked to the car, he reminded me that, as Christians, we can't forget the widows. I sought to take that to heart and for the next twenty-five years continued leading that study. During that period, I had many rich encounters with the residents, mainly the widows.

One of the women in that first study I led was a lady by the name of Eva May Clark. She has long since gone to be with Christ. One of the things I remember about Eva May was her recurring theme which she offered in almost every meeting. Too old to engage in the type of ministerial activities she enjoyed as a younger woman, she happily said she was available to do whatever she could. And it wasn't from a sense of bitterness or confusion that she offered her weekly refrain, "I'm not sure why God is keeping me here. I'm available to do whatever He pleases, but I'm ready to go anytime He wants me."

O to live a life of faithfulness where the prospect of departing feels like walking through a door! That is what Eva May had obtained. Such is the heart of the man in our current passage.

And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name *was* Simeon, and this man *was* just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him (Luke 2:25).

Just, Devout, Waiting

We are now introduced to a person we know very little about. Based upon certain comments made, we assume he is older. He doesn't appear to have any official post or office. We do know some things though. His name was Simeon. He was "**just and devout.**" He was "**waiting for the Consolation of Israel.**" And the Holy Spirit, even prior to Pentecost, was at work within/upon him.

More times than not, the Bible appears to record the sin of man over his righteousness (which is what "**just**" means *dikaiois*). And truly, our peace is found not in our own righteousness, but in the righteousness which comes by faith. May we all, as Paul would write,

...be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith (Philippians 3:9).

Still, let us not ignore or downplay the value of being just in terms of our personal behavior. Mary's husband, Joseph, is so called (Matthew 1:19), as was Zechariah and Elizabeth (Luke 1:6) and Joseph of Arimathea (Luke 23:50). I don't take these adjectives to be mere compliments of character (though they certainly are that) as much as a contrast to the religious and political culture in which they were living.

In these somewhat homey events recorded early in Luke, God was changing the world. Most in that culture would be on the wrong side of this transition. Truly, few were finding that "**narrow gate**" (Matthew 7:13, 14). Simeon was one of those few. Let us not underestimate the power of a godless, or anti-god, culture. Have you felt yourself silenced by such a dynamic? Are you willing to lovingly, yet boldly and uncompromisingly take rank against those who take rank against the Christian faith? The number seems to be on the rise, least in the west. Simeon appeared unphased by the dark world by which he was surrounded.

Some understand “**just**” as righteous toward man (the second table, it is so said, of the law) and “**devout**” as devoted toward God (the first table). Such a definition seems warranted by the following phrase, that he was “**waiting for the Consolation of Israel.**” Consolation (*paraklesin*) carries the idea of coming to one’s side. It is the comfort, encouragement, and alleviation of grief that Christ provides for those who are His. It is a warm and tender way to say that Simeon was anticipating the coming of Christ. It can be said of Simeon,

I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently find me (Proverbs 8:17).

Simeon was waiting and seeking, and (as we shall soon see) along with Anna may have been the only souls in Jerusalem who recognized Jesus.

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 (Luke 2:26).

Departing in Peace

The knowledge that he would “**not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ**” is a unique, prophetic gift given to Simeon that we should not expect to be given to us. Yet we are taught something about the heart of this (biblically labeled) just and devout man. There was something so important to him that the fulfillment of it would allow him to “**depart in peace**” (Luke 2:29) from this life.

There is a touching scene in the 1995 blockbuster, *Braveheart* (one scene in this movie must be fast-forwarded) where a father, Campbell, is dying after a battle. He is sitting with his grown son who had also been in the battle, Hamish. Hamish is seeking to ignite a fire under his dying father to continue living. But Campbell knows his time has come to an end. Yet he is at peace. He explains why. He had lived long enough to live free (something that eluded him almost all his life). And as he breathes his last, he tells his weeping son, that he was proud to see him become the man that he is. His final line, “I’m a happy man.”

We see these types of events periodically in Scripture. The revived spirit of Jacob having learned that his son, Joseph was actually alive, uttered **“It is enough; Joseph my son is still alive. I will go and see him before I die” (Genesis 45:28)**. Practically an entire chapter in Genesis is dedicated to Jacob’s words to his sons and his desires regarding his own burial just prior to his death (Genesis 49). We see a similar event with David and his son, Solomon (1 Kings 2).

You may wish to ask yourself from time to time just what would make you happy as your life comes to an end and you reflect upon it. Things like the Christian viability of our children. Good choices in terms of who they wish to spend their lives with. Well placed, godly, individuals put into critical roles in the lives of the ones you love. A life that honored and sought to glorify God. Simeon was not confused about what he wanted. We will speak more of that. For now, let us recognize that his clarity in terms of that which was of value in his life, allowed him to depart in peace.

So he came by 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 (Luke 2:27, 28).

The Savior in His Arms

Simeon was likely supernaturally guided by the Spirit into the temple just when Joseph and Mary would enter with Jesus. He would soon enter into the final song/poem/canticle/prayer surrounding the birth of Jesus. We will look more deeply into that prayer in our next meeting. For let us not sprint past the intimacy of the moment. Let’s get out of our speeding cars and hike a bit.

We (maybe it’s just me) tend to undervalue the startling contrast between the *transcendence* and *immanence* of God. That is, the God “out there” and the God “right here.” With such ease we pray **“Our Father.”** It is a term used of a family member. He is sitting there in the Barcalounger. Then immediately we shift to **“who art in heaven.”** He is in heaven, incomprehensibly high!

Simeon picked up the Savior of the world and held him in his arms. Luke (the Spirit) would have us pause and appreciate the intimacy. Simeon

did here what Jesus would do later, when He would take the children **“in his arms” (Mark 10:16)**. One of my pet-peeves when we examine young ministerial candidates is when they (and I have done this myself) approach such holy categories as if the Christian faith were mere academics. The things of God should hit us to the core. We should be **“cut to the heart” (Acts 2:37)**. Being carried is very intimate. I don't recall being carried as a child. But I do miss carrying my own children.

Isaiah, recording God's refutation of the idols of Babylon, writes,

Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been borne by me from before your birth, carried from the womb; ⁴ even to your old age I am he, and to gray hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save (Isaiah 46:3, 4).

Simeon now offers the blessing. For those confused about how Simeon can bless God, know the word, blessing merely means (to speak well of-*eulogesen*). And now the prayer.

Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, According to Your word (Luke 2:29).

Depart, Not Escape

In my research on this passage, I encountered those who understood Simeon to be uniquely otherworldly in this statement. As if to say, this world has never been my home. I don't really belong here. I'm glad to go. There is a great emphasis among some Christians that we are **“pilgrims”** in this world, mere **“sojourners” (1 Peter 2:11)**. It is true that our eternal **“citizenship is in heaven” (Philippians 3:20)**. But we are also citizens in the here and now.

We need to be careful to avoid being so other worldly that our heads end up in the clouds and we disengage. Paul, in examining whether it was better for him to be here or depart (and he certainly regarded being with Christ as **“far better.”**) found himself **“hard pressed between the two” (Philippians 1:23)**.

It would appear that the “**peace**” enjoyed by Simeon was not merely to leave this world (the promise “**According to [God’s] word**”), but that he would depart with the knowledge of what God would be doing in this world. This would include the Gospel as well as God’s own vindication. All of this Simeon saw. And it is summed up in one word.

For my eyes have seen Your salvation (Luke 2:30).

Blessed Eyes

Salvation, in every genuine sense, was seen by Simeon as he gazed upon the baby, Jesus. Many would see Jesus fully grown without the eyes to see this. Many are presented with the fulness of person of Christ, the One born of a virgin, truly Man, yet truly God. Many are presented with the fulness of the work of Christ, His miracle-working, His incomparable love for His Father and fellow man, His conquering of death in His resurrection and ascension to the right hand of the Father. And yet, they refuse to see in this full revelation what Simeon saw in this Baby.

It takes a special set of God-given eyes to see such things. What Jesus said many years later to His disciples (in contrast to the deaf ears and blind eyes by which He was surrounded), could be said here of Simeon,

But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear (Matthew 13:16).

It is of note that occasionally the Bible will speak as if things are hidden in Christ. In Him wisdom is hidden (Colossians 2:3), for the believer, we are “**hidden with Christ in God**” (Colossians 3:3). That special act of God’s grace where Simeon was given eyes to see that which was otherwise hidden from a hard heart, Calvin rightly extends to everything.

...for in Christ are hid all the parts of salvation and of a happy life.¹

¹ Calvin, J., & Pringle, W. (2010). *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Vol. 1, p. 144). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

May we all have eyes to see what Simeon saw while holding the baby Jesus in his arms.

Questions for Study

1. Define the words “just” and “devout.” Can we find peace with God by being ‘just’ enough or ‘devout’ enough? Is there value in being just and devout? Explain (page 3).
2. Why do you suppose Luke mentions that Simeon is just and devout (pages 3, 4)?
3. What does “the Consolation of Israel” mean? What does the fact that Simeon was waiting for it tell us about him (page 4)?
4. Have you ever asked yourself what would need to be the case for you to depart from this world in peace? What type of things do you come up with (pages 4, 5)?
5. Contrast the transcendence and immanence of God? Why do you suppose Luke recorded that Simeon held the baby Jesus in his arms (pages 5, 6)?
6. Should dying merely be thought of as an escape? Explain (page 6).
7. In what ways were Simeon eyes blessed? How can that be true for us (page 7)?