

Rev. Seth D. Bode †† Sermon 406, 12-27-2020 †† Christmas 1

“Lord God, you have appointed me as a pastor in your Church, but you see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon you: I wish to devote my mouth and my heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon your Word. Use me as your instrument -- but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all.”

LUKE 2

²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. This man was righteous and devout, waiting for the comfort of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. ²⁶ 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 Moved by the Spirit he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what was customary according to the law, ²⁸ Simeon took him into his arms and praised God. He said,

²⁹ Lord, you now dismiss your servant in peace, according to your word, ³⁰ because my eyes have seen your salvation, ³¹ which you have prepared before the face of all people, ³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.

³³ Joseph and the child's mother were amazed at the things that were spoken about him. ³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Listen carefully, this child is appointed for the falling and rising of many in Israel and for a sign that is spoken against, ³⁵ so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

³⁶ Anna, a prophetess, was there. She was a daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old. She had lived with her husband for seven years after her marriage, ³⁷ and then she was a widow of eighty-four years. She did not leave the temple complex, since she was worshipping with fasting and prayers night and day. ³⁸ Standing nearby at that very hour, she gave thanks to the Lord. She kept speaking about the child to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

³⁹ When they had accomplished everything according to the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town, Nazareth. ⁴⁰ The child grew and became strong. He was filled with wisdom, and God's favor was on him.



Christmas has created a monster. This monster is our little boy. He likes what he got for Christmas. But he likes his gifts so much that he gets upset when he

needs to eat, sleep, or go to church. Sound familiar?

To be clear, the monster is not our boy, but his sinful nature. The monster is in all of our sinful natures. The more gifts we receive—the things that we wanted—the more we desire them. This is fine, unless you refuse to eat and sleep and do important, daily things, because you needed to play with your new toys.

There is an old saying that “the cause of suffering is desire.” This is true whenever Solomon warns about greed, lust, and coveting in his proverbs. In the sense that we desire our new Christmas gives, Christmas has created a sinful monster.

Today we learn how to counteract that sinful desire and sinful nature itself in the lesson of Simeon, the priest. For Simeon, life was based on meeting Jesus Christ. That meant for Simeon that ...

CHRISTMAS CREATES A LIFESTYLE

1. How to wait for comfort

The first thing St. Luke tells us about Simeon is that this man was “*righteous and devout*.” By “righteous” he means Simeon acted rightly toward his neighbor, and “devout” tells us he was zealous in the service of God. However, when Luke adds that Simeon was “*waiting for the comfort of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him*” (v25), he indicates that Simeon’s piety and fear of God were not merely good habits, accepted family customs, or the result of good natural disposition. Instead, they were fruits of his living faith in the Messiah, who had been promised by the prophets, and a working of the Holy Spirit in him.

Prove that Simeon acted rightly toward his neighbor? As soon as Simeon recognized the promised Messiah in the baby Jesus, he praised God for sending the One whom the Father had “*prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for the glory to [His] people Israel*” (Luke 2:31-32). Simeon wasn’t thinking from a vantage point that desired only riches, honor, power, and good days that would be for the Jews alone. Simeon’s heart embraced all peoples, even the “Gentiles” sitting in darkness and the shadow of death—in other words, the entire world of sinners. The fact that the Redeemer had come for them, made Simeon so happy he could die right then and there.

Luke refers not only to Simeon's love of neighbor but also his love of God. Luke says, "*Moved by the Spirit he went into the temple courts*" (v27). Thus Simeon did not approach the temple out of habit or self-righteousness, performing an outward work of worship so as to earn something from God, but "*by the Spirit.*" He entered the house of God with a burning heart, full of spiritual life and holy hunger for God's Word. Simeon did not delay his repentance until his old age, but he turned to God early on and was prepared for anything, even death, once he received God's absolute forgiveness.

But the most remarkable thing we learn about Simeon is that he had received a revelation from God that "*he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ*" (v26). Did this knowledge give him a reckless sense of complacency, so he could stop growing in faith in order to simply "*eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die*" (Luke 12:19)? Far from it. The more certain Simeon was of his life, the more he used it with greater eagerness to prepare for his end.

So Luke tells us that Simeon followed a "*righteous and devout*" life, and it is not so that we ignore it. Luke says that so that you and I may learn to prepare for death, and trust that Christianity does not disregard our faith and use it as a license to sin or a license to complain about going to church. You and I are to prepare for death every day by putting our hope in the Christmas gospel.

2. How to depart in peace

In memory of Simeon, let's be careful not to suggest that he was "*righteous and devout*" without of faith. His just and devout life was in no way the foundation of his comfort in death. Let's be equally charitable with Anna, who never left the temple complex and worshiped "*with fasting and prayers night and day*" (v37). This isn't some white-washed, unrealistic version of who they really were. Otherwise we might dismiss Simeon and Anna as if unrealistic saints.

Luke praises Anna and Simeon highly, but Simeon does not praise his own works. He does not say, "Lord, *now you let your servant depart in peace* because I have lived righteously and devoutly." Let's not accuse Simeon of suggesting, "I have earned eternal life with my works. Now give me that reward based on my merits and deeds." Instead, the old man says, "*For my eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared for every people.*"

So Simeon places himself among the greatest sinners and heathens. The grace that alone can save them is Simeon's only comfort. He believed in the Savior of sinners as the comfort of Israel. He waited for the Savior of sinners his life long.

He carried the Savior of sinners continually in his heart. Jesus Christ, the Savior of sinners, was Simeon's only comfort—even in death.

In blessing mother Mary, Simeon also states that *"the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed"* (v35). On their deathbeds, people who have not thought about death are horrified to learn there is no hope of recovery. People who never gave a thought to their eternal souls and about being saved make for a gruesome scene. Compare this to the deathbed of one who has served the Lord in faith his life long. Take pious, old Simeon, for example. Does he turn pale and afraid that he will die soon? No, his weak eyes light up with joy at the announcement. Taking the Savior in his arms, he begins to praise God eloquently, saying, *"Lord, now you let your servant depart in peace, according to your Word; for my eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared before the face of all people, a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel"* (Luke 2:29-32).

This is the way to die. To be honest, it's how someone who is spiritually healthy from youth onward dies. You have already experienced the horrors of death when you repented of your sins. But you have overcome the horrors of death by the blood of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Now death has to check its weapons at the door. Faithful repentance disarms death.

Old servants of the Lord are not distressed because they have to be removed from the world by death. They have already forsaken this evil world and long to be home with the Lord. They have learned to love their Savior more.

They aren't frightened as they look back on life and then look ahead to judgment and eternity. They remember many sins of the past, yet they say, *"Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—and is at the right hand of God, who is indeed interceding for us"* (Romans 8:33-34). And *"there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus"* (Romans 8:1).

If you know you will not come into judgment, then you are not ashamed of Jesus here. You confess Him before the world as your Savior. Thus you know your Savior will not be ashamed of you in heaven, but will confess you as one of His own before the Father and all His angels. Therefore, your death is no death. It is a blessed journey into the mansions of eternal peace. Full of longing, you look forward to your last breath. And you slumber gently and silently as you cross pleasant boundary lines to the land of perfect joy. Amen.