

The Testimony of Simeon, Part 1

Luke 2:25-30

So today in Luke's Gospel in Chapter 2, we're crossing the midpoint of this great chapter, which wraps up the infancy narratives of Jesus, the Messiah, the Savior of the whole world. Luke has set some context for us so that we're going to have a deeper theological understanding of what's recorded here. Starting in verse 22, Luke brought us back for the rest of the chapter; he brought us back to the temple. Everything in the latter half of Chapter 2 happens there. And, and so the story continues really where it began, in Jerusalem at the temple. Jesus came to fulfill the law and the prophets. He came to fulfill righteousness on behalf of his people, and all of that is everything the temple stood for.

So there's really no better symbol in terms of a physical setting than the center of Israel's worship at the temple. That was where all the civil and ceremonial rituals were dutifully observed. And as a setting, it provides the perfect theological backdrop for the Gospel.

As we've seen, Joseph and Mary have come to the temple as righteous Jews. They've come to the temple to present Jesus to the Lord and to offer their own purification sacrifices that are associated with childbirth. Jesus' parents, it says there in Chapter 2 verse 39, says that, "They performed everything according to the Law of the Lord." They did everything, all of that, at the temple. Jesus' parents were faithful Jews.

That's what Luke wants us to see. They were believing Jews. They represent a faithful remnant of God's people. They lived in an apostate time. They lived in an apostate land in the midst of an apostate people. I'm not talking about just mere paganism; I'm talking about apostasy where people know the truth but then they turn their backs on the truth and go a different direction. That's apostasy, and that's the kind of land that they lived in. That's the kind of people they were among, their fellow Jews.

Though they lived in a land shrouded in darkness, they not only survived, they thrived. They thrived in faith in God alone. They thrived; they trusted him completely. They obeyed him willingly and wholeheartedly, and while they may have at times felt alone, they weren't alone. They were not at all alone. Earlier, God had introduced them to some believing shepherds while they were in Bethlehem and that was encouraging. Now

coming into the temple, Mary and Joseph are about to meet some fellow Old Testament saints, Simeon and Anna; more comfort coming from God, more encouragement in the fellowship of a small, but faithful remnant of saints.

Faithfulness, fidelity to the Scripture, then as now, didn't win favor. It didn't win status. It didn't result in big paychecks. It didn't result in public respect. It didn't result in prominence or fame. It's no accident that Luke tells us in verse 24 that the sacrifice, as you can see there, the sacrifice of Mary and Joseph that they offered at the temple was the offering of the poor. It was a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons. There's even a lower sacrifice in the Law of Moses, a lower offering which accommodated those who were almost totally destitute. Leviticus 5:11 says, "If someone cannot afford two turtledoves or two pigeons, then he shall bring as his offering for the sin that he has committed a tenth of an ephah of fine flour for a sin offering." That is real impoverishment, folks, when you can only afford to offer some bread.

But Joseph and Mary weren't that bad off. They definitely weren't rich, but they weren't absolutely destitute either. Joseph was a tradesman in a noble profession. He had the means to make a living wage. They could afford the burnt offerings,

and so they did afford them. They gave them. They faithfully offered the sacrifice that really fit their budget.

Nevertheless, it's significant that Luke once again, he notes their humble financial position here as we enter into the context of the temple.

It's mentioned in the setting of the temple. It's mentioned in the seat of Israel's wealth and power. It's mentioned at the center of the political and religious ambitions of the strong. It provides quite the contrast, really, in the place where the Messiah should be most honored and recognized, he's almost completely ignored. When the magi arrived about a year later or maybe a little more, all of the political and religious leaders in Jerusalem were oblivious to Jesus' recent birth. Why is that? Everyone was just too busy pursuing something more important.

Those who pursue righteousness, those who fear the Lord, Joseph and Mary, Simeon and Anna, they're virtually invisible to the surrounding culture, aren't they? Same thing today. Same thing, but God takes notice. God notices. God sees. In fact, it's his people, though often despised and set aside by the world, it's his people who are the ones who occupy center stage in the Biblical narrative. I know that we've mentioned Caesar Augustus and Quirinius, they're in the text. They're mentioned,

but really only as a backdrop. They're like props on the stage, set there to establish a setting. They're relatively unimportant in the larger scheme of things.

Luke, in fact here back at the temple, he tells us relatively little about the rich and famous in Jerusalem at the time when the Messiah makes his first visit to the temple here. We don't know the structure. We don't know the power. We don't know who's next, who's on the upswing, who's, who's important. We don't hear any of the names from CNN or Fox News or whoever you're watching. We don't see any of that here. It's unimportant.

We do, however, learn about Simeon. We do learn about Anna. Relative nobodies to the world, but model saints, exemplary citizens in the kingdom. Those are the people God commends to us. Those are the people the world ought to listen to, but doesn't. It's those people whose example they ought to follow, but they don't. And that's a theme that really runs all throughout Luke's Gospel, that this Gospel of divine salvation is for the poor. It's for the despised. It's for those who are set aside so often by the world and ignored, marginalized; those without wealth and power, those without status and fame. That describes, really, the majority of God's people. That is normal among God's saints, isn't it?

So it's fitting that when God sends a Savior, one who can sympathize with us, one who is made like us, one who has been tested in all the ways that we're tested, it's fitting that when God sent his Son into the world, he didn't send him into the home of wealth or power. He didn't put him in a place of prominence or public acclaim. God put the Savior of the world in a humble home. God put the Savior in the midst of humble origins that he might better represent us; better sympathize with us.

19th Century Anglican Bishop J. C. Ryle, he's a very insightful commentator on Scripture and really on the Christian life, but he wrote this, he said, quote, "Clearly, poverty was our Lord's condition on earth from the days of his earliest infancy. He was nursed and tended as a baby by a poor woman. Such condescension is truly marvelous. Such an example of humility passes man's understanding. The simple fact that Jesus was born of a poor woman and lived all his life on earth among poor people should silence the common argument that religion is not for the poor. Above all, it should encourage every poor believer as he approaches the throne of grace in prayer. Let him remember in all his prayers that his mighty mediator in heaven is used to poverty and knows from experience the heart of a poor man. It would be wonderful for the world if people engaged in

normal work could see that Christ is the poor man's friend." End quote.

I love that last line, don't you? "Christ is the poor man's friend." The Gospel truly is good news for all, and yet, of all, it's mostly the wealthy, the powerful, the self-contented, the selfishly ambitious, the self-made people of the world, they are most often the ones who miss it entirely. "How hard it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven." Jesus' humble parents and two elderly people, these here, are the best representatives of the Jewish religion and all those dark days in Jerusalem. It wasn't the rich and the powerful, it wasn't the religiously, outwardly pious who got the attention of God in heaven. Isaiah 66:2 says this, "This is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and," get this, "who trembles at my word."

Most often, those who are humble and contrite, those who tremble at God's word, those are the ones who are least respected in the wider world. They're easily walked on. They're easily set aside. They're easily pushed to the margins. And that was certainly true of Mary and Joseph. It was true of Simeon and Anna. They were ignored in Jerusalem, set aside as unimportant, and that's what all true Christians can expect. The saints, not

counted as wise by the world, but they live according to divine wisdom. They're not counted as strong, but they are strong in faith and they hold fast to an omnipotent God. They're not considered noble in any way. Oh, but that's a mistake because they are. They are adopted sons and daughters of the eternal king. They are part of a royal family, and they live according to royal laws manifest in holiness as God's true children of heaven.

Well, we're misunderstood, aren't we? Like Joseph and Mary, like the humble shepherds, like Simeon and Anna, the saints are sorely misjudged, tragically underestimated, but the righteous are significant in God's eyes, each one playing a crucial, vital role in God's redemptive plan. We have our role to play in this day, just as Simeon and Anna, did have theirs, in their day. They were faithful saints. They were fitting vessels. And that's what we're going to see today in Luke's introduction of Simeon, which also points us to Anna. He introduces these characters, and you're going to want to note the close correspondence that you see between Simeon's godly character and the high and holy message that Simeon proclaimed. His life befit the message, and the message was at home in his life. That's the way it ought to be for all of us, amen?



What's amazing to me is how the world, while so tragically underestimating faithful saints like Simeon, an old man, or Anna, an old widow, at the same time they underestimate them, the world elevates and admires people who are utterly unworthy of honor. The prophets of non-Christian religion, the prophets of modernism, the prophets of secularism, they are utterly corrupt people. Why do people follow them? Our culture has become accustomed to divorcing a person's character and his behavior from his or her ideas or worldview, as if the two have nothing to do with one another. In the eyes of many, corrupt behavior has no bearing on the moral philosophy that a person propounds. It seems that as long as someone is brilliant or can invent for us a really, really clever gadget, that that person is qualified to pontificate on every other topic, including politics and religion, philosophy, psychology, how to treat the human heart.

God's Word demonstrates that his favor rests on those whose lives are wholly his, those who walk in humility and contrition and repentance. God calls us to imitate those who follow the pattern of Jesus Christ. He chooses people, not perfect people but people who are steadily pursuing righteousness in their lives. In Crete, where Titus pastored a church in a culture of, quote, "liars, evil beasts and lazy gluttons," Paul

commanded him to find exemplary men to serve as elders. He didn't drop the standards of elder qualification to accommodate low cultural morality. Find men, he said, who are above reproach, faithful men who will hold fast to the faithful word, who will teach and rebuke those who emerge from an immoral culture. This insistence on personal holiness and the pursuit of godliness for the church and its leadership, it goes all the way back to Jesus' infancy, to "these days." We can see God's intention in the people that he uses to testify about his son; men like Simeon, women like Anna, and a young devout couple like Joseph and Mary.

The tendency to overlook the quiet example of humble saints, that needs to be proclaimed as well from the rooftops. We need to see these humble saints as commendable examples for our spiritual life for us to follow. Simeon, he comes into the narrative here as an unknown, kind of like the figure Melchizedek in the Old Testament, without father, mother, or genealogy. And so Luke, he doesn't commend him to us without an introduction, without telling us why we should listen to him. Luke wants us to know something about him, something about his character because Simeon is presented here as a witness who testifies about Jesus Christ, the most important person and the most important message in the entire universe.

Being a righteous man, he's a credible witness. Character counts, folks. God wants us to see the character of the people whom he has chosen to represent him, whom he has chosen to speak for him. God wants us to see the high and holy moral foundation for the Gospel itself, which is being laid right here in the pages of Scripture. No other moral, social, political or any other philosophy can match this. They are infinitely lower, being generated from the heart of sinful men, who are in rebellion against their creator. Why do we listen to that? We need to listen to this.

So God just doesn't use anyone. He doesn't commend those with questionable or even sinful character. Simeon, Anna, and then entering into Chapter 3, especially, as we see John the Baptist, these are the kinds of people who speak for God. These are the people to whom we must listen. As we consider this relatively unknown man Simeon, it wasn't Simeon's position, his fame, his status, it wasn't his fortune that qualified him to be God's spokesman. No human standards put him into a position to be God's witness, to provide a valid testimony to the significance of Jesus Christ. None of that mattered.

What we're going to see this morning are Simeon's credentials that are God's credentials of who speaks for him. As we see the

godly character of this otherwise unknown saint, my prayer is that we'll all be motivated to pursue the same godly life. Even as we, as most of will, pass our days in anonymity if we pursue this kind of man, this kind of life, we will be upheld in the kingdom of God as examples for others to follow. And that's what we want to do as we raise our children, as we raise another generation to follow Christ.

So follow along as I start reading the text here in verse 25, Luke 2:25, "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. 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. 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, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, 'Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation.'" Let's end there.

Let's get right to the first point in our outline: Simeon's saintly character. Luke begins here with some essential but some relatively minimal biographical information in verse 25. We learn his gender, his location, and his name. That's about it.

What's strange, though, is that Luke begins the narrative with this word in Greek. It's not translated in the ESV, but it's the word in Greek, behold. Behold, the NAS, the King James translators, they use it, but it's a word, this word, behold is a word that draws attention to something that's remarkable, something that's attention grabbing. Gabriel said, "behold," in verses, in Chapter 1, verse 20 when he announced the remarkable judgment of silence on Zechariah. That was remarkable.

Gabriel said, "behold," in Chapter 1 verse 31 when announcing the virgin conception. Okay, that's something unprecedented, right? Gabriel said, "behold," in Chapter 1 verse 36 when he informed Mary that her barren relative Elizabeth was now bearing a child, pregnant. Behold that! The angel who appeared to the shepherds, he said, in Chapter 2, verse 10, behold, when announcing good news of great joy for all the people. Behold is a word that is meant to grab our attention, focus it on something remarkable. Luke pushes us to look beyond the basic biographical details of Simeon to see his remarkable character, especially remarkable considering the setting he was in, apostate Jerusalem. Not easy to pursue righteousness in an unrighteous world, is it?

But if we'll cut through the clutter of an unrighteous world, we'll see the qualities that mark the true citizens of God's kingdom and his holy city. Here's how God saw this man Simeon, there in the rest of verse 25, "This man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel," that is to say, he was a conscientious worshiper of God. By describing Simeon as righteous, he's pictured here as closely adhering to the revealed word of God. He followed the prescriptions of the Law of Moses. He lived his life according to the ethical code of the law. He worshiped according to God's prescription in all the ceremonies and sacrifices, the feasts, the observances. For Simeon, worship didn't really mean, come as you are; it meant, come exactly the way God prescribed.

Has God changed? No. He still prescribes how we're to come before him. He still circumscribes our worship, wants it to be according to his word. But it's still important to recognize and emphasize here, Simeon's adherence to the law, it did not earn his righteousness before God. It demonstrated his righteousness. By following what God revealed, Simeon showed that he took God at his word. He showed that he believed God, that he trusted him. And on the basis of faith, Simeon was justified before God. And then his obedience proved his faith to those who watched his life. Now, we have here the testimony of God by the Holy Spirit,

here on the pages of Scripture; Simeon was indeed, not by earning it, but by believing God, he was a righteous man.

Not only that, but Simeon was also, the second word there is the word, devout. Fascinating word, used only by Luke as well as the writer of Hebrews, used only here in Luke's Gospel just one time. The literal translation of the word, devout, it's to take hold well. It's to take hold well and it conveys an idea of caution, of circumspection. We might translate the word as carefulness or conscientiousness. So Simeon was a man who was righteous and he was cautious.

He was a man who lived with a sense of the reverential fear of God, which resulted for him in two commitments. First, he was committed to restraining himself in an attitude of self-control. And second, he was committed to disciplining himself for the sake of godliness. Because he's a devout man, a reverent man, a man who fears the Lord, he is concerned on the one hand to avoid evil. He's concerned to prevent himself from sinning against God. At the same time, he's concerned to pursue righteousness, to obey God's law carefully. He's cautious before God. He's not haphazard, he's not loose. He's sober-minded. He's not whimsical, trivial. That's the idea.

So Simeon lives with a constant sense of awe before God, fearing God, keeping his commandments. And you might ask, well, what's the secret to a life like that? I want that kind of a life. I want to live righteous and devout before God, a conscientious worshiper of God. What's the secret? What inspired this righteous and devout attitude? It's not a secret. It's revealed right there in the text. Look at verse 25. It tells us everything we need to know. "He was righteous and devout," while he was, "waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him."