

42-032-1

The Testimony of Simeon, Part 3

Luke 2:29-35

January 24, 2016

Luke 2, Luke introduced us to Simeon. He invited us to behold this remarkable man. He was a righteous and devout man. He was living in a remarkably dark time. He was living among apostate people in an apostate city. But even in the darkest of times, we see throughout Scripture, God has preserved a remnant. God has continued to give a voice to his own word, a testimony to himself through faithful saints throughout the ages, and Simeon is one of them, along with Anna. They are among the few who make up the holy remnant of believing, faithful Old Testament saints in that time.

Joseph and Mary, they're also numbered among that remnant as well. And, they, all together they demonstrate quiet faithfulness in keeping the law of God. According to verse 39, it says there, "Joseph and Mary did everything according to the Law of the Lord." And you can be sure that theirs was not a mere external ritual. Their hearts were involved in it. So many in Jerusalem at that time were just going through the motions, if at all. But Joseph and Mary, they had come to worship God. They

came to give him thanks. They came to obey his word from a sincere and pure heart.

So by faith, Joseph and Mary have come to the temple, and they've come in obedience to the truth. Also by faith, Simeon and Anna have come to the temple in Messianic hope. The four of them, Joseph and Mary, Simeon and Anna, they're united here in the temple, in the court of the women, united in faith, united in obedience, united in hope. God then brought them all to the temple together to join together to gaze upon the object of their faith, this child that was born, this little baby and they're rejoicing in the consummation of their hope that the child represents. So, they've met here, Joseph and Mary, they've encountered this man Simeon. He was a stranger to them, but they got quickly introduced, and he's now holding their baby.

He's holding the baby Jesus in his arms. And we're about to consider his song. It's called the *Nunc Dimittis*, which is another Latin title taken from the first line of Simeon's song, "Now, Lord." Let's read the whole thing starting there in verse 28, Simeon "took the child 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 that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people

Israel.' And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him." We'll stop there for now.

Simeon's words actually don't stop there. He's got more to say in the next couple verses. But we want to start by taking a closer look at the few short lines of this song. And we need to ask the question, as we look at verse 33, what is it that caused Jesus' father, his supposed father, right? But his father, Joseph, and his mother, Mary, to marvel? Why did they marvel? This young couple had lately been privy to some pretty dramatic revelations. Each of them had been visited by an angel separately. Mary had visited Elizabeth and Zechariah, and there in their presence she heard prophetic words. She saw for herself the miraculous fulfillment of a promise to a very old couple when their son John was born.

And Mary had herself been filled with the Spirit, delivering her own Spirit-inspired song. Joseph and Mary, they had seen for themselves the physical evidence of what had been told to them, this baby that was born in Bethlehem. Any lingering doubts that Joseph may have had about the circumstance of Mary's conception, they seemed maybe dubious to him, but they were all fully and finally answered when the shepherds arrived within hours of the birth to give an amazing report that confirmed everything.

So Joseph and Mary had already been involved in the miraculous. They'd already seen and been involved in the heavenly, the angelic, the prophetic, the Messianic. And you might forgive them for becoming accustomed to the amazing, really, the marvelous and yet verse 33 says they "marveled." Why? Why exactly did they marvel? Some believe that they marveled because Simeon, a complete stranger, identified them, and approached them, and greeted them in such a public place. He singled them out. But as unexpectant as Simeon was, it wasn't necessarily Simeon as a man or the encounter itself that amazed them. Notice what verse 33 says, They "marveled at what was said about him." Again, it was the message, not strictly the messenger, but the message, that got their attention.

Simeon, he was a stranger to them, but what amazed them was the divine message that he brought. It was the prophetic word that gave Joseph and Mary some new and some unexpected information about the child. In fact, it's really no overstatement to say that if more people had heard and understood what Simeon said that day, Jerusalem would have been torn in two.

So what was it? What made them marvel at the things that Simeon said about him? This is about God's salvation. He says, "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace

according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation."

Back in verse 26, God had revealed to the aged Simeon by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. Again, that term, the Lord's Christ it refers back to the Messiah, all the promises about the Messiah, this descendant of David, anointed to be king over Israel, the one who's appointed to usher in the time of the Lord's favor for the nation. The Messiah would rule from Jerusalem, from the throne of his father David. He would be the means of fulfilling all of God's restoration promises to Israel, and that's exactly what he is.

But now, as Simeon approaches Mary and Joseph, as he sees the baby, as he takes him into his arms, Simeon refers to the child not as, the Lord's Christ, but as, your salvation. And that word salvation, the word for salvation, typically is the word *soteria*, but that's not the word used here. It's related. Simeon uses the related adjective *soterias*, which you could translate literally as saving. This is your saving, Lord. Simeon is speaking of the child not as salvation in and of himself; he's speaking of him as the means of salvation. Literally, he's saying, Lord, my eyes have seen your means of saving us. Jesus is the vehicle. He is the instrument by which God accomplished

his salvation. And that's why Simeon blessed God, verse 28, and not the child in his arms.

Parents, they were accustomed to rabbinic blessings pronounced on newborn babies. They might have even expected Simeon's blessing to line up with that tradition, but Simeon didn't do that. He didn't bless the baby; he blessed the God who sent the baby. Simeon looked through the physical reality of a flesh-and-blood, cute-as-a-button baby, like we all do, that he's holding in his arms, and he looks to the God who is salvation. Like, baby was the means of saving. He was the vehicle of salvation, and this is not to diminish Jesus in any way. Simeon didn't have the completed Christology that we have. He didn't have a completed New Testament canon in his hands, but he knew enough to see God as the source of this great salvation.

Simeon was utterly theocentric in his praise: Lord, you, your word, your salvation, your preparation, your people. And listen, that is important because some people can commit an error in their thinking about God. They subtly separate God on the one hand and Jesus on the other, as if God is the brooding wrathful, punishing judge of the Old Testament who is always looking on the world with a scowl. And Jesus is the tender-hearted son in the New Testament. He's the sunshine of love, and he comes in. It's as if Jesus kinda comes in and he steps

between his angry father and us poor sinners. It's as if Jesus is the one who keeps his father's bad temper in check. That caricature could not be further from the truth.

Jesus said, "I and the father are one." He said, "I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me." Jesus is the very embodiment of God's intention to save us. This is God's idea, this salvation, and Jesus is the very vessel of divine salvation. He is the incarnation of God's tender mercy. Salvation is of God. It's wholly of God and it's all of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Salvation is a Triune endeavor from beginning to end. You can't ever separate the triune God and pit them one against the other. That is not true. Simeon saw that clearly, and he saw it quite literally, too. He was holding the very vessel of his own salvation in his arms. And now everything else he said here elaborated on that salvation; it unpacked it.

And it's what Simeon said next, though, that caused Joseph and Mary to marvel. Take a look at verses 31 to 32. He said, "My eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel." Simeon was praising God for the salvation that he had prepared. That's a word that refers to getting everything ready; prepared, taking care of all

the details. God has prepared all things for his own glory, and his preparation started way before time began. It started before the creation of the world. God has endured objects of wrath prepared for destruction, Romans 9:22, as well as vessels of mercy prepared beforehand for glory, Romans 9:23. That's us, his people. And Ephesians 2:10 says, God "created us in Christ Jesus for good works, which," again, "God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." God has done a lot of preparation. He's done a lot of thinking, and he's putting it into effect here.

Jesus actually illustrated this word, prepared, when he compared God's preparation for the kingdom that's given to those he invites into the kingdom, he compared it to a wedding feast that was prepared and inviting the guests to it Jesus said tell those who are invited, tell them this, "See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast." Preparing a wedding feast in those days, it was more than a few trips to Safeway, okay? It was more than calling the caterer and bringing him out. They did all of this, not in front an electric oven or stove or range; they didn't have gas. They were cooking with fuel like wood, things like that. It was a lot of work. For them, preparation involved raising animals and then slaughtering animals and then skinning and bleeding them, butchering the



meat. The meat had to be prepared and cooked and proportioned along with all the other things that attended the meal to serve the guests.

Frankly, the kind of hospitality that's assumed in Biblical culture, it's become a lost art in our day. It's hard for us even as a culture to connect with what is meant here as far as preparation. A lot of two-income homes mean you're eating on the fly, fractured families, generational divide, the constant barrage of relationship-destroying media. I watch people as they go out to restaurants. Four people in a family and, their, each of them on their phones. They don't even notice the server coming up, hey can I bring you your food? Can you look up long enough to notice me and get your stuff out of the way? I don't know if you've seen that. Wow!

Families barely even eat dinner together anymore. And it's almost become passé to invite people over to the home to sit down around a table to enjoy a prepared meal and quiet thoughtful conversation. In fact, having that kind of silence and having to stare face to face, not at your phone, but stare face to face that's become uncomfortable, right? Often these days it's grab and go. In fact, homes are even being designed these days to keep the kitchen kind of connected to the living room where the big screen TV is set and mounted so you don't

have to turn away from the game while you're grabbing your snacks.

But we in the church, we have the opportunity to learn once again how to live life together. Hospitality is a big, big deal in a biblical home. And as any hostess knows, as any host knows, preparation involves careful planning, as well as the coordination and the time it ensure that all the elements of the meal are ready at the same time. That's hard. And that serves the benefit of providing an enjoyable meal for the guests, which facilitates conversations and builds relationships.

It's fascinating to me that Jesus used that imagery of a host preparing a wedding banquet for guests to reveal the kind of preparation by which God prepared and readied the kingdom. The father had prepared for this salvation. He prepared to bring his beloved Son into the world, and it involved the most complex, most intricately coordinated planning ever. Preparation began in Genesis 1:1 with the creation of a world that would put God's glory on display. It involved the creation of mankind made in God's image, designed to know and appreciate and worship God.

Divine preparation continued even through the Fall with the first promise of salvation coming in Genesis 3:15, continued with the distinction between the righteous and the unrighteous, as Cain brought an unacceptable offering from the ground, the

product of his own labor. Abel, on the other hand, he brought a better sacrifice, an atoning sacrifice that involved the slaughtering of an animal, which was acknowledges the penalty of death for sins. That picture was put right into the very first sacrifice.

Divine preparation preserved Noah through an ark. It shows Abram from Ur of the Chaldeans and promised a righteous seed would come through Isaac, not Ishmael; through Jacob, not Esau. Divine preparation selected Judah as the ruling tribe of Israel. Divine preparation sent Israel into Egypt and then drew him out again by miraculous intervention. It provided manifold pictures to illustrate the nature of divine redemption. For as God said, "Out of Egypt I called my Son."

Divine preparation gave Israel the Law of Moses with all its sacrifices and rituals, all its ceremonies and festivals, all picturing Christ, all pointing to Christ, every single one foreshadowing divine salvation in Christ. God prepared for that. Divine preparation gave Israel the fathers and the prophets, gave Israel the priesthood, gave Israel the monarchy. All of that to get God's people ready to meet salvation in the form of Jesus Christ, who is the prophet, the priest, the great High Priest, and the Davidic king.

Divine preparation judged Israel's sin and idolatry, punishing the nation through conquest and exile and then bringing them back to the land again where they would long and pine and ache for redemption and restoration. Divine preparation readied God's people to have Messianic expectation as they waited and looked as God pointed them to himself as the only hope, the only one who could save and deliver them.

As we saw early in Luke Chapters 1 and 2, divine preparation was even at work among the nations. The Babylonians were replaced by the Persians, who were replaced by the Greeks, who were replaced by the Romans, and all that to set up Caesar Augustus. As the Empire transitioned from a Republic to an Empire, as the first Emperor Caesar Augustus, he makes a decree and he wants a census taken of the land and under the administration of Quirinius. That's what sent the holy family to Bethlehem in the first place, where divine preparation ensured that there would be no room available in the inn except a humble cattle stall, so that the baby Jesus would be born, swaddled and laid in a manger. And why was that?

That prepared Mary and Joseph to receive the shepherds to hear their report. Got them in close proximity to Jerusalem where we find them now at this point. Man, so many details. Too many details to name and far too complex for any human mind to

coordinate. And they say this was written by mere men! Many things revealed in the Old Testament, prophesied hundreds, even thousands of years beforehand, so we could see the divine mind at work, so we would know for certain that God was bringing to pass what he had ordained from eternity past.

Simeon speaks of the salvation God prepared, and it's prepared in the presence of all the peoples. That is a phrase that literally means prepared before the face of, in the presence of, it's before the face of, it's where everyone can see, that is to say, none of this had been hidden; none of it had been done in secret. As Paul said to Festus at the end of the book of Acts, "The king knows about these things [...]. For I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this has not been done in a corner," Festus. "What are you going to do about it?" All of this has been laid open for everyone to see. In fact, it's no accident that this very conversation is taking place in public, once again, in the court of the women at the temple. Anyone could have listened in to what Simeon was saying. But, as every preacher knows, many hear, but very few actually listen, and even fewer still heed the message.

Joseph and Mary, they didn't have time, necessarily, to ponder all the significance of what Simeon had just said. No

sooner had he spoken of God's preparation of salvation, which culminated in this child, Jesus, than he specified here exactly what he meant by all peoples. And here is where things start to get a bit dicey, from a Jewish perspective anyway. "All peoples" according to verse 32, meant Jew and Gentile. You see that there? "A light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel." Some commentators, myself included, they see light there in opposition to salvation. So, Simeon blessed God for "your salvation that is light." Light. And after that, Simeon puts revelation in parallel relationship with glory. So the two lines would read like this, Light for revelation to the Gentiles; light for glory to your people Israel.

The light of divine salvation, it results in two things: Revelation and glory. Revelation for the ignorant Gentiles, glory for the disgraced Jews. Light lifts Gentiles out of the darkness, and light lifts Israel out of the shame and the humiliation that God had subjected them to because of their sin and idolatry. Salvation God prepared in the presence of all peoples it's a light that binds both Jew and Gentile together in one glorious people of God.

Listen, let's take a moment to reflect on the implications of all of this for us today. First, go back to Simeon's words about divine preparation. God prepared Jesus to accomplish

salvation, and as we saw, I mean just the tip of the iceberg, really, that involved an amazing amount of detail and coordination. God's amazing providence was on display in his preparation, which brings glory to his absolute wisdom and his sovereignty over all things. Listen, just on a personal note here, with God at the helm of the universe, bringing everything into conformity with his will, every act, every fact, every molecule, do you think it's possible he's behind the acts and the facts and the molecules in our day-to-day lives, as well? Certainly, we have every reason to trust him. Even when we don't understand all the answers, even when we don't know where it's all going, we have every reason to trust him, to put our faith in him, to embrace him as our God and Savior.