

Simeon's Song

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 22 December 2019

Preacher: Dylan Marais

[0 : 00] Well, morning everyone, and lovely to be here again, and we're ending our Advent series just in time for Christmas, that's what it's designed to do, and I'm hoping that you've enjoyed it and had your thinking expanded and focused on Jesus and who He is and what He's come to do and what that means for you and for us and indeed for our world.

Well, I wonder what your experience of Christmas will be this year. What will your experience of Christmas be like this year? You know, people normally fit into three camps when it comes to Christmas.

Those who love everything about it, probably mostly the children, the shopping, the gift wrapping, family, I mean, what's not to like? And then you get those who hate it, probably some of us older folk, us, well, too much time, too much effort.

There's the money, and then there's that family again. And then maybe you've got mixed feelings about Christmas. You love it. You love Christmas time. But maybe it's tinged with unhappiness or maybe uncomfortableness.

Maybe you've lost a loved one, and this time of year is especially difficult and poignant. Or maybe there's family members that you've got to think about, you've got to deal with. And there might be some things that come up, especially at this time of year, that you don't want to deal with.

[1 : 27] What will your experience of Jesus be this Christmas? Will he be a major part of your celebration? Will he be a little sort of by-the-way side part of your celebration? Or will he not be wanted in your celebration at Christmastime at all?

Well, if you've got your Bibles, please turn with me to Luke chapter 2, the reading that Nick did. And we're going to look at the last song in this Advent series of Luke, what's called the Nunc Dimittis, if it's up on the screen.

Nunc Dimittis is one of them. It's the Latin words for the opening of the song that Simeon sings, or the praise that he gives, saying, now, Lord, now you dismiss your servant.

In our NIV, it starts with, sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant. But in many translations, it starts with, now dismiss your servant in peace, sovereign Lord, as you have promised.

And it continues in the Latin. So, we're going to look at what's Simeon and what's happening here in Luke chapter 2. And what we'll find in this last Advent song is that it kind of sums up many of the Advent songs that we've had before, but it does introduce one or two very interesting new things for us to look at.

[2 : 58] One of the main things that I hope you've been receiving or getting from our series is that Jesus is a king. That's one of the main things that we've got to understand that Luke is portraying for us in the Advent songs.

Have a look at what Simeon is looking for, just from verse 25. Now, there's a man in Jerusalem called Simeon who was righteous and devout.

He was 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 die before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

Okay. So there you've got Simeon waiting for something very special. It seems like he's been waiting his whole life. We don't quite know how long he's been waiting. But he's been waiting for something really special and really big.

And he's not going to leave this earth until God shows him who that person is. But there's something very specific about this person that God is going to show him.

[4 : 03] It's going to be the Lord's Christ or the Christ of the Lord. Okay. Well, what does that mean? Well, it means that this person that Simeon is going to see in just a few moments is going to be a king because that's what the word Christ means.

In case you've missed our series and haven't quite got it yet, Luke tells us again that the person coming to earth is a king. And not just any king. He's the king of the Jews.

And that has some very important things attached to it. But just to make a point about this word Christ, you know, very often we think that Jesus, that his surname is Christ.

You know, that he's born to Mr. and Mrs. Christ. Because it's Jesus Christ. Like I'm Dylan Marais. We forget that Christ is actually a title. The English word Christ comes from the Greek word Christos.

And that in turn is a translation of the Hebrew word Messiah. And it literally means someone who is anointed. Now, in Christian circles, yes, it refers to Jesus.

[5 : 08] But a lot of people would have been christened or anointed in the ancient world. When you became a king, for example, someone would take oil and pour it over your head.

That was the Old Testament picture of when the people of God became kings, Saul and David. They would take oil and pour it over their heads. Representing, of course, the pouring out of the Holy Spirit.

So that that person who was chosen by God would be empowered to be able to be the king of his people. Are you with me on that? So Christ means to be christened or anointed.

Christening and anointing is the same thing. When you christen a baby, you just pour water on their heads. And so Christ, the important thing that Simeon is waiting for, that Luke wants us to get about this person that's going to arrive, is that he's a king.

Are you with me on that? You've got that. Now, he's not just any king. He's a king that the Jews have been waiting for for many, many, many, many years. Have a look at what Simeon has been waiting for.

[6 : 10] We've read it already, verse 25. Simeon was waiting for the consolation of Israel. And the Holy Spirit was on him. And it revealed to him he wouldn't die before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. 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, Sovereign Lord, as you've promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace.

Now, Luke, again and again, makes the point that what the Jews have been waiting for has been coming along for many, many, many years. Do you remember in the previous songs, Luke goes out of his way to make the point that these promises, the things that are happening in front of them, have been made to Abraham.

Do you remember the Magnificat and the Benedictus? Do you want to just have a quick look? Should we just have a quick look at that? Just turn back with me if you've got your Bibles there. Back to chapter 1.

And in Zechariah's song, he praises God, verse 68. He's going to bring salvation, verse 71.

- [7 : 25] To show mercy, verse 72. And verse 73, he's doing all of this because of the oath that he saw to our father, Abraham. So Abraham is 2,000 years before Jesus.
- And I think I made that point when I taught on Zechariah's song. That the Jews have been waiting for about 2,000 years for this person to come and bring their salvation.
- And back to Zechariah, his words come more out of Isaiah. Sorry, back to Simeon. If you look at his song, you'll see there are a lot of themes that come out of the book of Isaiah.
- And we've read them, for example, in Isaiah 49. But let's look at a few of those to see what they highlight. From verse 29. I'm back in Simeon now.
- Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people. A light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people, Israel.
- [8 : 31] Jesus is not just any king. He is the culmination of the hope of an entire nation's history. In our story today, both Simeon and then a little bit later on, Anna, they're waiting for the same thing.
- Simeon is waiting for the consolation of Israel. Anna is waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem. They're kind of the same thing. But these are very ancient promises that come directly out of the book of Isaiah.
- Now Isaiah was... And I just want to spend a little bit of time in the book of Isaiah so you can see where these promises come from. Now Isaiah was living from about 740 BC till about 680 BC.
- He was alive during the destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel. You remember that the kingdom of Israel had been split in half just after Solomon. And the northern tribes of Israel had fallen in the year 720 BC.
- 20 years later, in 700 BC, Isaiah was still alive when the Syrians came down again. The Syrians are the ones that took the northern ten tribes out of existence just about.
- [9 : 39] 20 years later, they came knocking on the door of the southern kingdom of Judah on Jerusalem's doorstep. And there was a huge siege in Jerusalem. And Isaiah was still there. So he was living in very tumultuous times, filled with regret and sorrow and pain.
- And God, through Isaiah, was promising both judgment and restoration. The thing is, his people were almost so far gone that judgment was inevitable. But because he loved them and because he had made those important promises to Abraham, he wouldn't stay angry forever, but restore them once more.
- And the language that is used by Isaiah is one of comfort, consolation, and redemption. The same kind of language that you see in Simeon's song. So let's just quickly have a look in Isaiah just to highlight one or two things there.
- Turn with me to Isaiah 52. It wasn't in our reading, but it's an important reading in Isaiah because it brings together these two themes of consolation and redemption.
- Isaiah 52, and it's famous words I'll read from verse 7 onwards. It says, Okay, so just notice in verse 9 and 10, that language of comfort, redemption, and salvation.
- [11 : 38] Now, why would the Jews need to be comforted? They've been afflicted so badly by all the things that God has sent them. But of course, as we mentioned before, those things are, God sends affliction, or God sends their enemies to them because of their own affliction to themselves, because of their sin.
- So to receive comfort is to receive assurance that the horrible thing that you've been experiencing won't last, number one, or that it will come to an end, or has come to an end, and that you have someone on your side that will make it better.

That's the important bit about receiving comfort. The interesting thing about the Greek word is it's parakletos, and we know from John that, remember, Jesus talks about sending another comforter to his people?

You receive comfort through a person. Now, we receive it through Jesus, but also through the Holy Spirit. To receive redemption is to be set free from someone who has taken you captive or who owns you like a slave master.

Now, who's going to be doing all of this for God's people? Well, it's going to be Jesus, the king. And who are these lovely promises made to God's people?

[12 : 52] All based on the promises made to Abraham. So the lovely thing that Simeon is saying to the people of Israel is, hey, your salvation has arrived. We've been waiting 700 years.

Imagine waiting 700 years for God to do something. And when it finally arrives, you're just so thankful that he's there and that he's doing all these lovely things for you. Okay, but that's good for the Jews.

What about people who aren't the Jews? What about us? How can we be sure of God's goodwill towards us? How can we be his friend?

How can we experience his comforts and salvation? The amazing thing that God promises is that this salvation is not only for his people, who, let's be honest, don't deserve it, but it's also for us, who also don't deserve it.

If his own people, when they don't listen to him, deserve his judgment, how much more do we, who don't even care about God or what he says, how much more don't we deserve it?

[13 : 59] The incredible thing is that God doesn't only want his people to experience these things, comfort, redemption, salvation, but he wants the whole world to have comfort and peace and redemption and salvation.

Now, that's a reading that we have. So, in Isaiah, just turn back to Isaiah 49. And here's the first surprising thing about Simeon's song that he highlights.

God promises salvation again in Isaiah 49. He's going to send a person, the first few verses, Listen to me, you islands, hear this, you distant nations. Before I was born, the Lord called me.

From my birth, he has made mention of my name. He made my mouth like a sharpened sword, and the shadow of his hand hid me, and he made me into a polished arrow and concealed me in his quiver. He's talking about Jesus, and he's got something very directly prepared for him.

And just turn over to verse 5. Now the Lord says, He who formed me in the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him, and gather Israel to himself.

[15 : 01] For I am honored in the eyes of the Lord, and my God has been my strength. He says, It is too small a thing for you to be my servant, to restore the tribes of Jacob, and bring back those of Israel I have kept.

I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth. Here's a very surprising thing that Simeon says in his song, is that the salvation that God has given to the Jews is not only for the Jews, it's also for the Gentiles.

And that would have been a bit of a mind shift for the Jews at the time. They were very happy for God to send his king, knowing exactly what his king is going to do, to destroy his enemies. But here, he's going to shine a light, so that his enemies can see what's happening, and move towards the light, and be saved.

So Jesus is a king. He's going to bring salvation and redemption to his people, the Jews, and he's also going to be a light for the Gentiles. Interesting thing, this word light.

Why do we the Gentiles need light in order to come to Christ? Well, it's because we're living in darkness. Light here has to do with knowledge and understanding, seeing and knowing.

[16 : 21] You all know what it's like when you're in a dark room. In order to be able to function and get things done, you need to know what's around you. You need light. When ESCOM cuts our power, the first thing we do is reach for a torch, or if you're a teenager, for the battery pack for your phone.

So why do we need light? God is saying to the Gentiles, people who don't know God, who are lost in a deep, dark fog, living in confusion and anxiety, not knowing how life is working, telling people who live, and life in a dark place is painful, because you keep bumping into things.

Your toes and your shins tend to take a hammering when you can't see. Well, the ancient pagan world was really lost in this deep darkness, worshipping pieces of wood and stone and metal as though they were gods, living broken and corrupt lives.

Modern man is no different. We're no different. Our gods are still made of the same things, homes, offices, cars, and the various little trinkets that we fill our lives with. Our thinking is also dark.

We don't even look for God. We just live our own life our own way. Where does all this darkened thinking lead to? Does it lead to freedom? Does it lead to happiness?

[17 : 36] Not really. It leads to slavery and misery. There's so many people living so many broken lives because they're fumbling around in the dark thinking this is the way they should live. We need light in order to live properly, in order to see properly.

Where does this light come from? Can we generate it ourselves? No, not really. It's only found in Jesus. You know, the funny thing is, life is much easier if you live with the light on.

If you live in the light. It's the same living with Jesus. He lets you see things properly, clearly. And once you see the world around you as it really is, you begin to avoid the things that trip you up and cause problems in your life.

We're in Isaiah. Let's turn back to Simony. I just want to continue our study there. So Simeon says, Sovereign Lord, as you have promised. I'm back in Luke chapter 2 now.

Sovereign Lord, as you have promised. You now dismiss your servant at peace, for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have promised in the sight of all people. A light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.

[18 : 45] These are lovely things that God has promised to his people. Consolation, comfort, redemption being set free, salvation, which is kind of rescue, and not only his people, but all people.

If the song had stopped there, we would have ended on a high. We said, okay, great. That's lovely things we're going to receive this Christmas time. Excellent. But Simeon doesn't stop there. The song of Simeon stops there, but Simeon keeps talking to Mary.

Have a look at verse 33. The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed him and said to Mary, his mother, this child is destined to cause the falling and the 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.

Well, isn't that interesting? What's happening here? Where's all this coming from? What's going on here?

Well, you'll remember from our previous studies, in fact, the very first one, the Magnificat. You remember what Mary sang? That God will overturn all these things and bring down the proud and humble them and lift up the humble.

[20 : 10] Well, he's doing the same thing over here. This theme of overthrow and revolution is going to continue in the ministry of Jesus. Funny thing is, in fact, he says this is why Jesus has come.

Have a look. This, in verse 34. This child is destined to cause the falling and the rising of many in Israel and to be a sign. In fact, it says in some translations he was appointed to be a sign that will be spoken against.

He's actually sent for this very purpose, to bring this upheaval about, to bring division and cause upheaval. And why is this a necessary part of the kingship of Jesus?

Can't he just bring peace and everyone just get along? Well, the thing about light is you react to it depending on what you're doing. If you know you're lost and want help, light is the most important thing for you.

But if you're being naughty and you think that what you're doing is fine in the dark, then light is the last thing that you want, like a thief or someone else. Light exposes the things that you want to keep hidden.

[21 : 12] Once long ago, I did an army camp back in the day when army camps were done at school. And we did a night march.

And we were set up into different groups. And we had camouflage. And we were going to attack and ambush the other groups. And if you saw that light coming, you ducked and dived. You didn't want to be seen because you were trying to catch them out.

Anyway, later on in that same night, we got very, very, very lost in this camp. It was a huge campsite on the West Coast. And then the one thing we wanted was light, knowing, gee, where are we?

How do we get out of here? Yeah, there's a light. Okay. And then we moved towards the light. Jesus being a light bringer will reveal the thoughts of many hearts. Now that is quite scary if you think about it.

Well, it's only scary if you have something to hide. Jesus has been given the power by God to see into our hearts, to see what we think, to see what motivates us, to hear what we say in secret behind people's backs, to know what we do when we think no one is watching.

[22 : 18] He's given the power to judge our desires and internal motivations. Jesus is no ordinary king. He's been given amazing powers by God to be able to judge the thoughts of people's hearts.

I guess this is why Jesus gets such a strong reaction in his day as well as ours. How you respond to Jesus will reveal something about your hearts.

Well, let me highlight one or two things or one or two stories about Jesus looking into people's hearts from the book of Luke, just so that you get it as well, that you know that that's exactly what Jesus does.

If you turn over to Luke chapter 4, you'll see that his very first sermon, he does this. Luke chapter 4, it's a famous passage where Jesus preaches his very first sermon and he says some lovely things.

The spirit of the Lord is on me, I'm in verse 18, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom from the prisoners and recover sight from the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

[23 : 27] You think, okay, great. If you're a Jew, you're thinking, great, let's get all these things. That's lovely. Then Jesus has a little conversation with the Jews there and they say, oh, isn't this Joseph's son?

Isn't he just, why is he telling us these things? Who does he think he is? And then Jesus calls them out from verse 24. I tell you the truth, Jesus continues, no prophet is accepted in his home town.

I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon.

And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elijah the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed, only Naaman the Syrian. And then the crowd gets furious. All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this.

They got up, drove him out of the town, took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built in order to throw him down the cliff. But he walked right to the crowd and went on his way.

[24 : 29] So the thing about, the surprising thing about this passage, the song of Simeon, one of the surprising things is that Jesus has come not just to bring peace but also division and also upheaval to show people, to look into their hearts and to reveal what's really going on inside.

Well, back to my original question. What will your experience of Christmas be like this year? If you haven't yet come to Christ to serve him as your king, you need to know that your secrets are going to be revealed.

Our secret thoughts, our secret words, and our secret actions. Your experience of Jesus will depend on what you do about that. You can either hold on to your sin and experience unrest and not peace.

You can experience sorrow and not joy, pain and not comfort. But that doesn't come from Jesus. That just comes from your own sin. That just comes from living your life your way and all the pain and the turmoil that comes along with that.

Or, you can take your sin and your problems and your worries and your anxieties to Jesus and let the wonderful promises of God come true in your life.

[25 : 43] Instead of pain and anguish, Jesus will give you peace. Instead of worry and guilt, he'll give you comfort. Instead of slavery to your desires, he'll give you freedom.

He'll take away all the things in life that stops you from having joy and freedom and light and peace and all the good things that he promises us that we remember at this time of year but he promises us throughout the year.

He offers us in a word, salvation. I guess salvation wraps up all of those ideas. And all you have to do to get these things is just ask him, all right, well maybe you serve your king.

Maybe you serve Jesus as king and he's performed these things in your life but your family hasn't come to Christ and there's upheaval and tension and conflict and these things will play out over Christmas time, maybe even over the Christmas table.

Jesus says it would happen. Take courage and take your worries and concerns and pain and hurt to Jesus. God delights in bringing people out from darkness into light.

[26 : 47] He delights to forgive them their sin and free them from their shackles of the past. After all, he's done that for us. Won't he do it more for our families if we just ask him? And again, all you have to do is ask and all these things are available to us not just at Christmas time but we remember these things at Christmas time, the lovely things that Jesus offers us and that we can come to him and that we can have all the bad things in our life taken away and that he can shine the light, his light into our life and take all the bad and just shine, okay, these are the bad things, okay, watch out there, bring that to me, I'll take care of that.

Similar like what we did with the Lord's Supper. Just come to him and ask him forgiveness. He is a king, he's a mighty king, he can see all these things but at the same time he offers forgiveness and hope and reconciliation.

So let's ask Jesus for these things at Christmas time. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, thank you for sending Jesus into the world at this Christmas time.

Thank you for the redemption and salvation that he brought about, that these are things that he gave us and promised many, many years ago.

Lord, that if we need comfort and we need redemption and we need salvation and we need light, that all these things are available to Jesus and they're not just to your people but to us also so that we too can come and receive all these lovely things.

[28 : 23] Lord, help us to remember that and to live it out in our lives especially as we face the coming days up to running up to Christmas, not running around too much but focusing on you and remembering all these things that you offer us.

In Jesus' name, Amen..