

Luke 2:29-32

Why Simeon Rejoiced

January 1, 2012

I wonder what people thought of this old man named Simeon. Knowing that in every age people who take their faith seriously are often misunderstood and even sometimes the object of ridicule, I wonder if people recognized Simeon for the devout man he was – or instead simply thought him to be a bit strange. After all, here was a man who is not identified as a priest or a church worker, but who apparently spent an awful lot of time at the Temple in Jerusalem. And, on top of that, here was a man who claimed to have received a special message from God...

I wonder if, when people in Jerusalem were giving tours of their city to friends and visitors, they considered him to be somewhat of a community landmark or part of the local "Temple-district" flavor. I wonder if, when they caught a glimpse of him, they'd tell their friends, "O yeah, that's Simeon. He hangs around the Temple day and night. Says that God told him he wouldn't die until he saw the Messiah. It's okay. He's harmless."

And finally, I wonder if, when he woke up that morning, Simeon knew that today was going to be the day that he had long anticipated, yearned for and prayed about. Because the day in our text was indeed the greatest day in aged Simeon's life...

This morning we're going to take a closer look at this man and this one day in his life, and, on the basis of our text, discover WHY SIMEON REJOICED. According to his own words, this is what we'll find the answer to be: Simeon rejoiced 1. Because he had a God who kept His promises 2. Because he and the world had a Savior 3. Because this God and Savior brought him peace and made his life complete

As we work through these reasons, we'll see that we have the very same grounds as Simeon had to rejoice in our God and Savior...

Listen again to the background information we are given: **"Now there was 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. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts."** Simeon, a devout man, was the classic Old Testament believer. He was looking forward to the coming of **"the Lord's Christ"** (the promised Messiah) who would be the **"consolation of Israel"** (the One who brought God's people deep spiritual comfort). In that respect he was no different than thousands of other devout believers.

But what did make him different was this: In some unmistakable way God the Holy Spirit had revealed to Simeon that he would not die until he personally had seen the promised Messiah with his own eyes. We are not told how long Simeon lived with this promise, but we are told that on this particular day he was somehow directed by the Holy Spirit to go to the temple courts (an area outside the temple proper). This he did. And there he waited.

According to Old Testament law, a male child was to be presented to the Lord at the temple after a 40 day period of purification had taken place. Mary and Joseph had reached that point and were now bringing Baby Jesus to the temple. As we imagine them making their way through the temple courts, they are intercepted by an old man. They don't know him, but he knows them... Our text continues: **"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 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."

Why did Simeon rejoice? Because God kept His promises. First was the promise God had made personally to Simeon that he would not die before seeing the Messiah. That promise had now been fulfilled. This forty day old baby that aged Simeon was now cradling in his arms and gazing at intently was the Promised One... Immanuel... **"God with us."** And on that day Simeon was reconfirmed in a fact he already knew: God is true to His promises.

But there was a much larger promise that was fulfilled in that Child. It was the age-old promise God had made to a world held captive to sin. It was the promise made immediately after Adam and Eve sinned and introduced pain, death and damnation into the world. It was the promise that **"the offspring of the woman"** would someday come and undo all the damage that sin had done. It was the promise that the Old Testament prophets proclaimed at various times and in various places of a Redeemer from sin. That Savior, long promised and long foretold, was at that very moment in the hands of Simeon...

... Who rejoiced because this was his Savior. Simeon knew that the child he held was not going to be the world's next great doctor or lawyer or teacher or statesman. The world of his day, like our day, had enough of them. What the world needed – and what Simeon, devout as he was, personally needed – was a Savior. And now he was seeing him with his own eyes. **"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."** In other words, Jesus is the provider of Salvation for both Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews). And in this personal, yet universal Savior, Simeon rejoiced...

And well he should have, because this Savior provided something for Simeon that nothing else could. In Jesus Simeon found peace, and Jesus made his life complete. We see this from the opening words of his son of praise (entitled in Latin the "Nunc Dimittis"). Simeon had lived his entire life out of love for the God who promised the world a Savior from sin. In fact we can say without any overstatement that his entire life had been one long dress rehearsal for the moment he was now experiencing.

And now that he had experienced this blessed, promised encounter, Simeon says he's ready to go. He's ready to be with His Lord. So he says: **"Sovereign Lord, as You have promised, you now dismiss Your servant in peace."** We are not told how long Simeon lived after this event. What we do know is that Simeon was a man at complete peace with God and was now ready to be dismissed from his earthly service to Him.

The things that Simeon rejoiced in are cause for our rejoicing as well. First is the fact that God is completely reliable when it comes to the promises He makes to us. Let's spend just a moment looking at some of them...

Listen to these words of God in Isaiah 43: **"Fear not, for I have redeemed you. I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior."** This is the promise that God will never leave us or forsake us, even in our darkest days or our toughest times.

Listen to these words of Jesus in Matthew 28: **"And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age."** This is the promise of Jesus' abiding presence in our lives. We are never alone. We are never unattended. We are never unloved.

Listen to these verbally inspired words of the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 10: **"No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."** This is the promise that, despite our own perception of things, God will not allow a burden to come upon us that is too heavy to bear; and that He will provide us with either a solution or the strength to endure as we look to Him for help.

Finally, listen to the words of Jesus that precede what may be the most identifiable passage in the Bible, John 3:16: **"Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in Him may have eternal life."** This is the promise of eternal life for all who look to the crucified and risen Lord Jesus as their Savior from sin.

This is just a sampling of the promises that God gives us in His Word. There are many, many more, all of which comfort and strengthen us. Are they reliable? Does He keep the promises He makes? Yes. Ask Simeon.

Secondly, as Simeon rejoiced in the fact that Jesus was his Savior, so do we. You know, there are a lot of things we can do without. I'm guessing that within the last two days most of us received some nice gifts. But I'm also guessing that in the big picture they are not what we would call essential for a productive, happy life.

That kind of gift needed for a productive, happy life was already given. Sorry for using an overused phrase, but Jesus is the gift that keeps on giving. Because wrapped up in those swaddling clothes are things like the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Lying in the manger is the Babe who would grow up to be a man and whose life, death and resurrection would liberate us from sin, death and hell. Simeon knew this. What this elderly man with the smile on his face and the far-away look in his eye was cradling against his chest was more than a cute baby. This was his Savior. And that caused him to rejoice. And it causes us to rejoice as well.