

## The Testimony of Simeon, Part 1

Luke 2:25-30

January 17, 2016

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. As we learned last week, Luke has set some context for us so that we're going to have a deeper theological understanding of what's recorded here. Some fascinating verses last week, and as we saw 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. As we saw 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.

I'm currently reading a book by historian and biographer Paul Johnson called *The Intellectuals*. Fascinating book. It's basically an exposé of significant figures whose ideas have shaped the modern world over the last few centuries, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Leo Tolstoy, Carl Marx, Bertrand Russell, John Paul Sartre, George Orwell, just a few of the names. Their writings have fundamentally shaped the world we live in. Their thinking influences the way we think. They've been passed down

to us, commended to us as heroes. We live in the institutions and the systems of thought that they've built for us. And all of these public intellectuals emerged, as Johnson writes here, out of, quote, "the decline of clerical power in the 18th Century." That is, the decline of religious authority in a modern secularizing world. They emerged as new mentors, quote, "to fill the vacuum and capture the ear of society." That they did. To a man, these intellectual guides of modern society they were ruthlessly critical of religion, of religious authority, of morality, of transcendent objective truth. They criticized any moral authority but their own, and they used people for their own interests, which they believed was for the higher good.

Paul Johnson believes it's time to turn the eye of critical scrutiny on the intellectuals. He writes this, quote, "After two centuries, during which the influence of religion has continued to decline and secular intellectuals have played an ever-growing role in shaping our attitudes and institutions, it's time to examine their record, both public and personal. In particular, I want to focus on the moral and judgmental credentials of intellectuals to tell mankind how to conduct itself. How did they run their own lives? With what degree of rectitude did they

behave to family, friends and associates? Were they just in their sexual and financial dealings? Did they tell and write the truth?" End quote.

Just as one example, in the chapter on Jean Jacques Rousseau, he's the 18th century social and political philosopher whose ideas influenced the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, and the American Revolution, Rousseau was utterly self-absorbed, immoral and ungrateful. He acted like an overgrown, spoiled child. He used everyone, especially older women, and then manipulated them into thinking he was doing them a favor by allowing them to provide for him. As an example of this blinding egotism, he said of himself, quote, "Show me a better man than me, a heart more loving, more tender, more sensitive." Then he says, "Posterity will honor me because it is my due." The same man who wrote those exalted words about himself also abandoned his own children. Five of them were borne by one of his mistresses, and like the thousands of abandoned infants in France in the late 1700's, his children never saw adulthood. They died in an overcrowded public orphanage. Rousseau, being criticized by some of his contemporaries, actually attempted to justify this cold-hearted cruelty toward his own flesh and

blood. Paul Johnson records his justification being this, quote, "It was exactly what Plato had advocated; the children would be all the better for not being delicately reared, since it would make them more robust." Then Johnson draws this important connection, "By a curious chain of infamous moral logic, Rousseau's iniquity as a parent was linked to his ideological offspring, the future totalitarian state." Rousseau, he's a tragic and sad man, and he's described by one his lovers in her old age as, quote, "a pathetic figure whom she treated with gentleness and kindness." She said, "He was an interesting mad man."

We might be okay to leave it there as yet another example of the tragedy of fallen mankind, if it weren't for the fact that many of Rousseau's ideas formed the basis of modern political and educational thought, including our thought here in this country. The concept of the state as parent to all of society, including orphanages and state run education and all the rest, all of that flows from Rousseau's iniquitous heart, his parental guilt, his lifelong attempts to justify his name. And the fact that so many have believed him to be a great man is clear evidence that sin has a blinding power on those who walk

in darkness. It's understandable for the world, right? They're dead in trespasses and sins, but for us in the church, for Christians, we see the disastrous results of divorcing character and message, of separating behavior and proclamation.

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. Even as we read earlier 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.

So for this morning we're going to focus on the character of this man Simeon. We'll see what he had to say next week. Yes, all that was introduction, but I wanted you to see the stark contrast between the saints that God commends and the kind of people that the world respects and commends. Listen, to build our education system, how we raise and educate our children based on the advice of a cold-hearted, deadbeat dad who couldn't even be bothered to raise his own children, the lunacy of that needs to be punctuated.

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. That's what I want you to



see this morning, okay? 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. Simeon's saintly character. It's there in your bulletin, the outline. 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."

Two things that motivated Simeon to be a conscientious, sincere, serious-minded worshiper of God. First, his mind was focused on the future; second, his life was subject to the Holy Spirit. That phrase, "waiting for the consolation of Israel," tells us a lot about Simeon. First, he was looking to the future. Simeon is a man of great faith. He believed the promises, particularly the restoration promises, that God gave through the prophets. Considering the deplorable spiritual condition of Israel at that time, in light of a general apostasy, with all of its cultural accommodation, with its capitulation to the Romans, with its embrace of pagan religious principals, its rank sinfulness, listen, for Simeon to keep looking for God to fulfill his promises in the middle of that kind of a day, for Simeon to keep waiting for the consolation of Israel, well, that's something to behold, isn't it? That's

remarkable faith. No wonder Luke said, “Behold this, look at this guy.”

Simeon waited for the consolation of Israel. He waited. He looked for better days. His best days, in fact, were all ahead of him. They were all in the future. That word waiting, it doesn't imply any sense of impatience whatsoever. It doesn't imply any sense of grumbling. It doesn't imply the foolish sense of Oh, we had better days back then. He wasn't sentimental about the old days. He was hopeful for the new days. Simeon is waiting expectantly, eagerly, patiently. Why? Because he believed the promises that God would one day console Israel; God would one day comfort Israel.

Israel had fallen under the judgment of God. The nation had been subdued, conquered. Most of its citizens were carted off to exile. And even though the people were back in the land, they were no better off for it. Most of Israel continued in its spiritual corruption, preferring the worldly pursuits of wealth and status to walking humbly and faithfully before God. Though the nation as a whole deserved nothing but more severe judgment,

there was a faithful remnant, who believed the promises of restoration, who waited expectantly, who prayed fervently, who watched for the signs that God was fulfilling his promises. Simeon is a member of those people. Those are his people, that remnant.

As I said, promises of comfort and restoration, they were written large of the entire Old Testament, beginning with Moses and going all the way through to the prophet Malachi. So from beginning to end of the Old Testament, God promised restoration. The bulk of these promises, the highest concentration of these promises, they're found in the book of Isaiah. Let me give you a few just to give you a sense, a taste of this. Isaiah 40 verse 1 says, "Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins." Comfort.

Isaiah 49:13, "Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth; break forth, O mountains, into singing! For the Lord has comforted his people and will have compassion on his afflicted."



Isaiah 52:9, "Break forth together into singing, you waste places of Jerusalem, for the Lord has comforted his people; he has redeemed Jerusalem." Remember what was to happen right after Isaiah prophesied? They were to be waste places. In the midst of that, he's prophesying comfort. Isaiah 66:13, "As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem." Such tender words of comfort, consolation. And since God's words of judgment had been fulfilled so literally with such brutal, unrelenting specificity, Simeon had every expectation that the promises of restoration would in the same way be filled in the same literal sense with the same specificity.

One interesting footnote here, you see the word, consolation there in verse 25? You know what that word is? It's the Greek word *paraklesis*. You've heard the word before. Heard the word paraclete? Do you know what that word is? That's the word Jesus used as a name for the Holy Spirit in John 16:7, "I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper," the Paraclete, "would not come to you." It's the same word, Paraclete, *parakletos*. "But if I go," Jesus promises his disciples, "I will send him to you." The

Paraclete. Simeon couldn't have seen that coming, exactly. He didn't know Acts Chapter 2 was right around the corner, but he was clearly a conscientious believer, putting all of his hope in God. He looked back to God's promises in faith, trusting God, taking him at his word, believing him and that caused him to look forward to God to keep his word of promise in the future. That's faith, simple faith.

Little did Simeon know that comfort and consolation would come from God by means of the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, the Comforter, the very Holy Spirit who was active in his life. As a matter of fact, that Holy Spirit would take an active part in the consolation of Israel. Verse 25 says there at the beginning of the verse, it had begun, "The Holy Spirit was upon him." That's the second reason that Simeon was such a righteous devout believer and worshiper. He lived in subjection to the Holy Spirit.

Yes, the Holy Spirit was active in Old Testament times, even before Acts chapter 2, far before Acts chapter 2. In fact, Genesis 1:2, "The Spirit of God hovered over the waters," right?



From beginning and all the way through, the Holy Spirit has been there, ever present, ever active, effervescent in his activity on earth and in the lives of believers.

Church isn't the only entity with claim upon the Holy Spirit. We're not the only ones to depend on his power and his activity. Simeon knew his presence as well, even if he didn't know him as well as we do. He was taught by the clear testimony of the Old Testament. We're going to see all this more in a moment, but Simeon lived in subjection to the Holy Spirit. He lived in submission to his word. Simeon was directed by the Holy Spirit's will right into the temple on that day. So all that to say, point one: Simeon is a genuine example of an Old Testament saint. He's righteous and devout, he lives in faith, he reaches forward in hope. He trusts in God implicitly, fully, such an encouraging example to us, certainly a fit vessel for God's purpose, someone that is commended to us as someone to listen to.

Let's take a look at our second point: Simeon's spiritual purpose. Look at the text again, verses 26 to 28. We'll start at

the end of verse 25, "The Holy Spirit was upon him." Then verse 26, "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." Let's stop there.

Here, we see the convergence of two law-abiding parents and a Spirit-directed man, and they come together to reveal a divine purpose. The Spirit and the word once again, in lockstep harmony. It's impossible to imagine how the Holy Spirit's revelation to Simeon, that he wouldn't die until he saw the Lord's Messiah, it's impossible to imagine how much that inflamed Simeon's already fervent and passionate desire. I mean, based on faith in Scripture, Simon already hoped in God's promises. He's waiting, anticipating, expecting, but this personal promise by the Holy Spirit had to leave him restless, had to leave him anxious to see the Lord's Christ. When is it going to come? He's looking at his watch. Is it now?

We don't know how long Simeon had been living with this burdensome revelation, but it couldn't have been too long. The text gives every indication, I think, that Simeon is an old man. Young men don't anticipate death in the same way old men do, so the Spirit's promise had to have filled Simeon with great hope. Had to have filled him with an unshakeable confidence; probably felt a little bit invincible, too. Sure, I'll have a second donut; it really can't kill me, trust me! My personal belief is that the Holy Spirit told Simeon about the soon arrival of the Lord's Christ probably months earlier, not likely more than a year earlier. It would seem to be too heavy a burden to carry for too long a period of time, to be knowing that the Messiah was coming soon. It would make sense that this revelation came later in his life to encourage a man who was already anticipating death, wondering if God would fulfill his promises in his own lifetime. But, nevertheless, we're not told exactly.

What we do know is that the Spirit decided to send him into the temple; decided on the very same day that Joseph and Mary arrived there to send him there. Providence was active in Joseph and Mary; special direction was active in Simeon. And the meeting between these three probably took place in the court of

the women where Mary was allowed to go, allowed to go no closer. And it's in that setting, in the temple in the court of the women that Simeon realizes the culmination of his life and his spiritual purpose. And notice there it's a twofold spiritual purpose, one that is shared by all true believers, incidentally.

This is the same purpose for our lives as well. First, Simeon would testify that this baby, the one named Jesus, it's the Lord's Christ. That's our purpose, too, isn't it? We tell others that Jesus of Nazareth is the Lord's Christ, the Messiah, the one anointed by God, the one approved by God. We tell others that Jesus is the one who fulfilled all the Old Testament prophecies, that God sent him to be the Savior and the ruler of the world. We tell others that there is "salvation in no other name, for there is no other name under heaven by which men must be saved." It's a purpose that started right there in Luke Chapter 2 in the heart of the temple. It was Simeon's purpose, as well, his spiritual purpose, that we show solidarity with, and we find continuity of fellowship with him by doing the very same thing, fulfilling the very same spiritual purpose.

The text says in verse 28, Simeon took Christ Jesus in his arms. This isn't like the picture of the Lion King holding the baby up high, you know, showing him to the watching crowd. It's not that. It's an old Greek word used only here in the New Testament, and it refers to the curve or the inner angle of the arm. Literally, this pictures Simeon, as you might imagine older men doing, cradling Jesus in the crook of his arm. He's cradling Jesus. Can you imagine holding the baby Jesus? It's a picture here of tender affection of an old man who's at the end of his life, embracing in his arms his own Savior, who's at the beginning of his life. Just like Simeon, we embrace Jesus as our Savior in the same way, with tender affection, with reverent appreciation. In what he said, in what he did, in the way he did it, Simeon testified that this is the Lord's Christ. That's what we do, too.

Second aspect of Simeon's spiritual purpose is in those two words at the end of verse 28, Simeon "blessed God." Simeon blessed God. By witnessing to the Christ of God, Simeon was also giving glory to God. Christ came to glorify God; all of us likewise we exist to give glory to God, and Simeon is no different. In fact, notice how theocentric his prayer is. Look,

"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 the glory to your people Israel."

Six times Simeon directs his praise and blessing to God, and he does so publicly; he does so out loud, such that all within earshot can hear it. Lord, you, your word, your salvation, your preparation, your people; whether it's personal or national, this is all about you, Lord. Like Simeon, we also exist for a spiritual purpose, don't we? And it's the same spiritual purpose, to give a true testimony to Christ and to give glory to God. What's more important than that to live for, to talk about? What's more important than that to tell other people about, to have conversations about? That's why we exist.

Let's consider a third point that helps us understand the godly character of this special agent of God's truth: Simeon's self-identity. Simeon's self-identity, verse 29, take a look just quickly. "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in



peace, according to your word." At this point, I think our modern translations mute the significance a bit of what Simeon has said. Listen to that verse, that verse again, but from the CSB, the Christian Standard Bible translation. "Now Master, you can dismiss your slave in peace." That's very literal. That's very literal. The word translated Lord or master, it's not the typical word, *kurios*, but the word *despotes*. That's where we get our word despot. We've come to see a despot as someone who is despotic, someone who's tyrannical in his rule. We think of a dictator, right? We think of a cruel leader of a totalitarian regime. But the word itself doesn't necessarily mean tyrant. The emphasis is on absolute power, totalitarian authority, and that is with our master exactly the same. But not the malevolent nature that accompanies despotic rulers that are human. God, when God is the despot, his slaves find him to be benevolent and kind, not malevolent. We willingly, readily come to Jesus and submit ourselves to his lordship. Jesus said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke," you know what yoke is? Sign up for slavery, folks. "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is," what? "easy and my burden is light."

Simeon here sees himself as a slave of his master. His own self-designation here, it's the word *doulos*, which literally means slave. Yeah, owned by someone else. That's the word he uses and the verb he uses there in verse 29, "Now you can let your servant depart," your slave depart. It's the verb *apalulo*. That's a common verb that was used to speak of the manumission of slaves, of setting slaves free. For most of human history, economies worldwide were built upon, dependent upon slave labor. The Bible acknowledges that fact and it makes use of that imagery, in a way that helps us to understand an aspect of truth about the believer's personal identity and his relationship to God.

This concept of slave ownership it's absolutely critical for a proper self-understanding. God's people belong to him. Why? They were created by him and they were bought with a price. Notice here, Simeon doesn't mourn belonging to God, does he? He's delighted to belong to his master. It fills him with joy to be a slave of the Lord. That's because God takes very good care of his slaves. To be owned by God means dignity, worth, significance, and purpose. To be owned, like this world would

tell you to do, to be owned by yourself and yourself alone that makes you very small. Simeon was happy in his master's service, and now that his mission was complete; he requested a release from service to be brought home.

Having patiently waited for the consolation of Israel, having waited eagerly to see the Lord's Christ, Simeon is content to wait patiently for God to release him, to allow him to depart in peace, according to his faithful word. Timing is up to you, Lord. That reveals one more aspect of Simeon's godly character we need to see. A fourth point in your outline: Simeon's simple ambition. Simeon's simple ambition. We might call this a humble ambition. Just quickly take another look at verses 29 to 30, "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation." We are going to think more carefully about the Lord's salvation next week as we consider the rest of Simeon's testimony, but for now, notice the quiet contentment expressed in one simple, but incredibly profound ambition, to see the Lord's salvation. Having seen the Lord's salvation in the person of baby Jesus, Simeon is ready to depart in peace. That's good enough for me.

J. C. Ryle points to Simeon as an example of how completely a believer can be delivered from the fear of death. He writes these words, "Simeon speaks like a person for whom the grave has lost its terrors and the world its charms. He speaks as one who knows where he is going when he departs this life and cares not how soon he goes." Are you unafraid of death like that? Do you look forward to the future with fear and anxiety, or with great anticipation and joy? For Simeon, there is nothing else he needs to accomplish. There is nothing else that's important on this earth. Nothing else is necessary. Nothing else that can hold his affections. He has seen the Lord's salvation embodied in the baby Jesus, and he is ready to go home. What else is there?

Do Simeon's godly qualities characterize you? There's a sense in which Simeon isn't anyone special; he's just a guy. But there's another sense in which he is absolutely remarkable, and we need to spend the morning, we needed to spend the morning to behold him, especially considering the surrounding social and cultural context. Jerusalem was an absolute cesspool of sin and corruption. And out of nowhere walks Simeon, testifying about Jesus Christ and giving glory to God. He's the picture of an Old

Testament saint, righteous and devout, trusting God, putting all his hope in God's promises. He's a man devoted to spiritual purposes, devoted to be used for God's work. He's a slave serving a master whom he loves dearly. His one ambition, his singular aim, is to see the Lord's salvation. Having seen it, he's seen all he needs to see. He's ready to depart in peace.

That's character, folks. That's a believing character right there, and character counts with God. God works through those who are characterized by holiness, by truth, by righteousness. God works through humble people, godly people, especially when it comes to representing God as a vessel fit to proclaim divine revelation. God chose Simeon to speak to the holy family. He designed, qualified, and commissioned him for this very purpose. "Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use set apart as holy useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work." Well, now that we're tuned in, now that Simeon is commended to us as a reliable witness, we're ready to listen to what he has to say. We'll do that next time. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we give thanks to you for the example of a humble saint like Simeon. As we'll see later, also a humble saint like Anna. Beautiful people in your sight. Dear saints as Psalm 116 says, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints." The death of his godly ones. And as these two departed to be with you, you received them with joy, with open arms, commended them as heroes of the faith. Father, we long to walk in their footsteps as well.

We're reminded as we come before the table of the Lord, to come before the table that Jesus himself instituted as a fellowship offering for us, we're reminded that we stand with Simeon and Anna, we stand with Joseph and Mary, we stand with Zecharias and Elizabeth in faith. We stand with them, wanting to be righteous and devout, waiting and hoping in you and in you alone. So we come before this table and acknowledge that, and I ask that you would direct our minds and our hearts toward the meaning symbolized in the elements of the bread and the cup. In Jesus' name, Amen.