

"A Song of Fulfillment"—Luke 2:28-32

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, "A Song of Fulfillment", is Luke 2:28-32 → *Simeon took Jesus 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."* This is the text.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus:

A number of years ago a movie was released entitled "The Bucket List." It portrayed a man who was terminally ill making a list of all the things he would endeavor to experience before he "kicked the bucket" (i.e. before he died). It would seem a natural response of many people when receiving news of terminal illness to figure out what they'd like to do with the rest of their life in light of it possibly being cut short.

It begs the question for me: "What would be the one experience in this life I desire the most before I die?" Tough question? Aside from the fact that I really don't want to die in the first place, it can be a difficult question to answer. Such a question may make some cherish more the

relationships of family and friends with a desire to spend as much time with them as possible. For others it may send them spinning into a mode of hopelessness and despair. For even others it may send them into intense efforts to right the wrongs they've done in life in a fruitless effort to attain heaven by their works.

The question, "What would be the one experience in this life I desire the most before I die?" was not a difficult question to answer for a man by the name of Simeon, to whom we are introduced in our text. Luke 2:25 describes Simeon as a *righteous and devout* man who was *waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him*.

According to Luke 2:26, he had somehow received a revelation from the Holy Spirit that *he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ*. There were many of God's faithful people who wanted to see the coming of the Messiah and experience the fulfillment of God's promises. Apparently Simeon had a special promise from the LORD in this regard.

As Simeon encountered the baby Jesus in the temple he could not help but praise God because the LORD had kept His promise to him. Encountering babies in the temple was actually rather commonplace for Simeon. The practice of offering the appropriate sacrifices for the ceremonial cleansing of the mother forty days after childbirth at the temple was required by Old Testament law (cf. Leviticus 12). As Mary and

Joseph entered the temple with the baby Jesus Simeon recognized Him as the Christ, again because of some kind of special revelation from the Holy Spirit. He immediately burst forth in a Spirit-inspired song which the Church has titled the “Nunc Dimittis,” based upon the first words of his song in Latin meaning “Lord, now.”

Simeon was actually expressing a deep contentment in his song. In verse 29 He said: *Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your Word.* It could be translated as a prayer: “Lord, now let Your servant depart in peace.” In order to pray such a prayer a person must have a sense of peace and contentment in his or her life.

Most people seek contentment in their lives. The real issue in their search is where to find it. Unfortunately many look for contentment in the wrong places only to be let down and disappointed. Thus, in the midst of much discontentment and even despair from unfulfilled expectations, restlessness finds people moving from one thing to the next, from one relationship to the next, from one “god” to the next “god” in a desperate search for satisfaction in life. They don’t realize that it can only be found in one place . . . as a gift of God.

Simeon expressed the basis for his contentment in verse 30 of our text: *for my eyes have seen Your salvation.* Contentment comes only when a person “sees” by faith God’s salvation in the presence of Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.

No, we have not received the privilege of cuddling Jesus in our arms as Simeon did. However, we have the privilege of experiencing His presence in many ways: through His Word that we can read daily; through His body—those who believe in Him (i.e. the Church); by receiving His body and blood in Communion during worship with His body of believers. We express the same attitude of Simeon after we have partaken of the Lord’s Supper by singing the same words: “Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace according to Thy word, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people.” (Lutheran Service Book, Divine Service Setting Three, p. 199)

Simeon’s “Christmas carol” reflects God’s faithfulness in keeping His promises which He prepared in advance to accomplish in peoples’ lives. According to verse 31 of our text God ***prepared*** this *salvation . . . in the presence of all peoples*.

Think about the many preparations we make in order to celebrate Christmas. We can be rather “picky” about such preparations because we want things to go just right in our celebrations. God also made many preparations for the first Christmas to happen exactly right. Not just Simeon but all of us are privileged to receive the benefits of those preparations since Jesus’ salvation is for ***all peoples!*** Preparations were made on the basis of His promises for ***everyone*** to join the celebration and sing praises to Jesus.

Giving us the gift of the Babe in Bethlehem involved a specific timetable for the LORD. Galatians 4:4 says that *when **the fullness of time had come**, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law*. Why did Mary, Joseph and Jesus meet Simeon in the temple? Because they were fulfilling the requirements of *the law* according to **God's timing**. Simeon's song reflects his joy not just in seeing the Christ Child but also in the fact that God's preparations and promises came to life in every detail.

Faith moves us to live, trusting in God's great and many promises to us. This can be rather challenging at times because it means waiting for the LORD to act in His time, in His way, according to His plan. We are not told how much time elapsed from the revelation Simeon received concerning his seeing the Christ to its actual fulfillment. However, we do get the impression that he waited patiently and faithfully looked *upon the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living* (cf. Psalm 27:13).

Verse 32 of our text refers to Jesus as *a light for revelation to the Gentiles*. Since the Gentiles did not have the revealed knowledge of God's promises in the Scriptures they needed special *revelation*. They were truly living in spiritual darkness on a path to hell.

It also says that Jesus would bring *glory to God's people Israel*. God's *people Israel* can *glory* in Jesus because they have the privilege of experiencing the ultimate fulfillment of God's love and grace which

was pictured in their religious ceremonial requirements. Unless those requirements were done by faith in Jesus they too were living in spiritual darkness on a path to hell.

Romans 3:22-25 puts it this way: *there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus . . . to be received by faith.* Since we are all sinners who fall short of God's *glory* we need God's salvation through faith in the *glory* of Jesus, the Christ. John 1:14 says of Jesus: *the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.* Jesus is the embodiment of God's faithfulness to His promises for us. This truly is a song of God's fulfillment.

Even Mary and Joseph could not receive the benefits of offering the appropriate sacrifices for her purification as recorded in the context **without faith in their son as the Son of God, the Messiah, their own Redeemer from sin.** They were doing a requirement of the law in the presence of the very One Who was sent to fulfill that law.

Faith in the accomplished work of Jesus Christ brings peace and contentment in God's faithfulness. He keeps His promises. Our songs of joy at Christmas time and our preparations to celebrate Christ's birth can also reflect joy as we experience God's blessings **in His time.** Those blessings come through confession of our sins and trust in Jesus

as our Savior. In humble repentance we are enlightened with God's grace, forgiveness and love in Christ Jesus.

The "Nunc Dimittis" expresses the concept that "It doesn't get any better than this!" Experiencing the salvation of our God in light of Jesus Christ compares to no other experience on "the bucket list" of life. It brings a peace with God which removes the desperate search for contentment in life and finds fulfillment in life wrapped up in the Baby of Bethlehem. This is the real meaning of our songs of Christmas. Amen.

I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the LORD

in the land of the living!

Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage;

wait for the LORD!

(Psalm 27:13-14)

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