

Simeons Song

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[0 : 00] Well, I'd like us together to turn back to Luke chapter 2 and we'll read verses 27 to 32 again. And he came in the spirit into the temple at Simeon 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're 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.

So in the run up to Christmas, we're doing a short series called Four Songs for Christmas, all of which are found in Luke chapter 1 and 2. Mary's song in chapter 1, 46 to 55, Zechariah's song comes just after it in 68 to 79.

Then we have the angel song in 214 and now we have Simeon song in 29 to 32. And these are described as hymns because they're set out in poetic form and they capture many of the key truths that lie at the heart of why Jesus came.

And we've been summarizing the teaching of these songs under the following categories. Mary's song teaches us that Jesus is born to cause disruption, Zechariah's that is born to bring deliverance.

[1 : 22] The angel song that is born to give us delight and Simeon song that Jesus is born to transform our departure. So a couple of weeks ago we started with Mary's song, Jesus is born to cause disruption and we saw that this is the turning point in history.

Jesus's arrival disrupts the whole of the history of the world. This is the moment when God intervenes. The son of God has come to be our savior and to take his place as king and redemptive history, that narrative of how God's saving purposes are unfolded across the generations.

It goes from people saying he's coming to now being able to say he's here. And of course that disrupts our lives as well because this is something that we all have to think about.

But not to disrupt our lives, to mess our lives up, but to disrupt our lives and bring us from light, from darkness into light and give us the new life that only he can offer.

We saw that Zechariah's song has come to give us deliverance and we were unpacking how this song reminds us of a one of a key dynamic in the Gospel that we are taking from something into something.

[2 : 35] And so the Gospel is always about from to. So we're delivered from spiritual disaster, delivered into eternal security, from slavery to sin, into freedom in the Gospel, from alienation from God, into his family as his beloved children.

And that from to is so much part of what Jesus has come to do. Last week we looked at the angel's song, we saw that Jesus has come to give us delight. They came with good news of great joy and it's just so, so, so important that we never forget that the message of Christianity is a message of joy and delight.

It's not something to make us sad or miserable or gloomy. It is something to fill us with unspeakable delight in what God has done for us.

And the reason that we can have such delight in the Gospel is because as we saw last week and as the angel said in the Gospel, God gets the glory, we get peace. God gets the glory because he has done everything needed for our salvation.

That means that we cannot improve it. So we don't need to try and impress God and we don't need to try and work our way up to his standards. We can't improve it, we don't have to. But also so wonderfully for everyone who trusts in Jesus, the fact that God is the one who does everything means that you can't ruin it.

[3 : 55] You can't mess up what he is doing. And that's what makes you safe and secure in him forever. And that's why we get peace because the unstoppable ability of God means that we can rest in him and that's why God really can come to you and say, do not be afraid because of the security and peace that Jesus gives us.

Today we're going to conclude our little series with Simeon's song, Jesus is born to transform our departure. And this is such a crucial thing for us to think about. Again, it's at the heart of why Jesus came.

At Christmas, we are all thinking about Jesus's arrival. But all the time, Jesus is thinking about your departure.

And if there's anything that you and I need to think about is the fact that one day we are going to depart from life here into eternity.

And Simeon's song is going to help us think about that. We've got two headings, what Simeon knew and what Simeon didn't know. So going through these one by one will probably be like two thirds of our time on what Simeon knew and then we'll be, well, I say one third of our time.

[5 : 13] The truth is I'll be kind of rushing and panicking and running out of time as I always do every week. But you're all used to that by now. So we might as well go with it. So one of the fascinating things about Simeon is that he clearly knew more than the people around him.

And that's a fascinating thing because throughout the Gospels again and again and again, you see that Jesus is frequently misunderstood. And there's even moments when Mary and Joseph didn't fully understand Jesus.

You saw that at the end of the passage that they all read for us that Mary and Joseph didn't understand what Jesus was doing and they were quite distressed at his actions.

And that happened again and again. People misunderstood Jesus. It happened then, it happens now. But not Simeon or certainly not Simeon in anything like the same way that we have in other people.

Simeon seems to understand much more. The song, his song reveals an amazing insight into who Jesus is and why he's come.

[6 : 15] And that of course shouldn't surprise us because Simeon's described in this way as a devout man waiting for the constellation of Israel. The Holy Spirit was upon him.

And of course that's reminding us that for Simeon and for every other person, including us, anyone who's able to understand more and more of the Gospel is because God, the Holy Spirit is helping us.

So what did Simeon know? Well I'm going to suggest five things that he knew. Number one, Simeon knew that Israel needed the Christ.

And so that's highlighted for us in verse 26. He had been told by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death until he had seen the Lord's Christ. Now when you hear that word Christ, you should be thinking of the word anointed.

That's what the word means. And when you hear the word anointed in relation to the Bible, you should be thinking of three things. You should be thinking of prophet, priest and king.

[7 : 18] There were three crucial roles in the life of Old Testament Israel and people were anointed to take up these positions.

And the Christ was the one promised in the Old Testament who would fulfill all three of these roles. So the Christ is the anointed one, the Christ is the prophet, the priest and the king.

And Israel desperately needed this. They needed this because they had lost the kingdom centuries earlier. That's how the Old Testament ends. The kingdom is lost and throughout the inter-testamental period and into the New Testament Israel is under the control of foreign empires. The prophets had gone silent. So for 400 years, nothing. And the priesthood was a mess.

So in the period between the Old Testament and the New Testament, the inter-testamental period, there was a lot of corruption, a lot of chaos in relation to the priesthood. And now as we come into the New Testament period, there's different groups vying for power in terms of the religious leadership of the people.

[8 : 26] So Simeon knew that Israel desperately needed a prophet to bring them God's truth. They desperately needed a priest to restore a right relationship with God.

And they needed a king to rule and defend them. They desperately needed the Christ, God's anointed savior.

Number two, Simeon knew that that Christ was coming soon. And that had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit as we see there in verse 26.

And that means that Simeon joins Zachariah, Elizabeth, Mary, Joseph and a few others to whom God speaks in order to announce that this savior is now coming.

And for Simeon, that arrival is tied to his departure because the promise that God has given to him is to say, look, you're not going to die until you meet the savior.

[9 : 24] And as the opening words of the song declares, we see that God has kept his word. 29, Lord, you're letting yourself depart in peace because the savior's arrived.

My eyes have seen your salvation. Number three, Simeon also knew that this Christ is not just for Israel.

And that's such a crucial point to recognize that throughout the whole of the Old Testament, God's saving purposes have always been global. So the covenant established with Abraham way, way back in Genesis 12 through to 24 came with the promise that through Abraham, through his family, through his descendants, all the nations of the world are going to be blessed.

The purpose and the aim is always global. So although Israel in the Old Testament was chosen to be a chosen nation through which God's saving purposes will be revealed, it was never intended to be just for Israel.

It was always a plan for all people. And Simeon knew that. You can see that how he speaks about the Gentiles and Israel. Simeon knew that most of the people around him didn't.

[10 : 35] They saw themselves as the favored nation and everybody else the Gentiles were enemies, people you shouldn't even eat with, let alone imagine being part of the same saved community together.

The people around Simeon wanted to scatter the foreigners. And yet what God wanted all along was for the Christ to come and gather them.

And Simeon knew that. He speaks of the Christ as a light to the nations. And part of the glory of Israel is that they've been the channel through which that light has come, but the purposes and the aim is always, always global.

And so Simeon recognized that. He recognized that in the Old Testament, Israel functions as a shadow. And that family nation of Israel in the Old Testament is a shadow of God's true family, the church of Jesus Christ today.

So in the New Testament, it's narrow, it's focused, and in the New Testament, it's broad and wide. And in the Old Testament, there was often a message to say, well, look, Israel's a chosen nation.

[11 : 46] If you're foreign, you need to come to Jerusalem and you need to come, come, come. Whereas in the New Testament, it's reversed. And now Jesus is saying, go, go from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria to the ends of the earth with the gospel message.

And that's why today, and not everybody agrees on this, and sometimes it can be a point of controversy among Christians. But the position that our church comes from, and certainly my own position, is that that means today God's purposes are no longer centered on the political nation of Israel in the Middle East.

God's purposes are centered on the church, the true Israel, the building where Jew and Gentile are united together. One body, one family, fellow citizens with the saints, members of the household of God.

Simeon knew that God's purposes were not just for Israel, it was for everyone. Number four, Simeon knew that conflict lay ahead. You see that actually in the next verses, he says to Mary's mother, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel.

And again, this is a crucial insight that shows that Simeon knew more than those around him, because the people around Simeon expected the Christ to cause the rising of Israel and the falling of the Romans.

[13 : 09] So you remember at this time, Israel is under Roman rule, and so many expectations around the Messiah, around the Christ, are that he's going to get rid of the Romans, and Israel will rise.

But Simeon knew that that's not what's going to happen. He knew that the conflict and controversy is actually going to come within Israel.

And of course, that's exactly what happened. In particular, the conflict came amongst the religious leadership. They're the ones who resented Jesus. They opposed him, ultimately they crucified him.

And at the same time, they're the ones that Jesus criticized most sharply. So he frequently exposed their hypocrisy. And just as Simeon says, although they had this kind of outward appearance of piety and authority and spiritual importance, Jesus is recognizing that actually their hearts are going to be revealed, and their hearts are actually a long, long way from where they should be. So there's all this conflict where the people at the top of the kind of religious social standing in Israel, Jesus is going to bring them down.

[14:19] And at the same time, there's going to be a rising of those who are at the bottom. And that's the people Jesus reached out to, the sick, the poor, the rejected, the ones who are unlovable.

These are the ones that Jesus reached out to with amazing compassion. And that's what you'll go on to read. As we read through the rest of Luke or any of the other Gospels, you see that again and again, Jesus would turn the religious, social and cultural expectations of Israel upside down.

He was the friend of tax collectors and sinners. He said that to lead well, you need to be a servant. He said that the last shall be first and the first shall be last.

The powerful who thought they were at the top are going to fall. And the needy, the poor and the broken who felt stuck at the bottom are going to be lifted up.

So, what did Simeon know? Let me remind myself what I said. Simeon, number one, knew that Israel needed the Christ. Two, he knew that the Savior was coming soon. Three, he knew that the Christ was not just for Israel.

[15:22] Four, he knew that conflict lay ahead. Five, he knew that suffering was on its way. And that's revealed in what he says to Mary in verse 35, a sword will pierce her soul as well, you see it just in the parentheses there.

And that's what happened. Mary would suffer a lot. The Mary who carried her baby, her newborn baby into the temple in chapter two would go on to see a lot of controversy and criticism of her son. She'd experienced confusion and tension herself when she's trying to understand his mission. And ultimately, she is going to stand at the cross and watch him be crucified.

And so Simeon knew that the days ahead were not going to be easy. If the Christ was going to complete his mission, then that would mean walking down a path that is inevitably going to lead to great suffering.

So, it's amazing. It is amazing. Fascinating what Simeon knew. His song and the verses around it, the words he says, they reveal a level of understanding that make Simeon stand out from people around him and from other people we see later in the Gospel.

[16:41] But what I want to say is this, what Simeon knew transformed his departure. In other words, he knew that he was safe.

He knew that he was ready to die. He knew that he was secure for eternity.

And as we think about that, it just prompts one of the most important questions that we can ever ask. Do you know what Simeon knew?

So do you know that just like Israel needed the Christ, you need the Christ? Or actually, maybe it's more accurate to ask the question, do you know that you need the right Christ?

Now, I say that because the word Christ means anointed one and the biblical offices of prophet, priest and king, it's so easy to think, that just sounds like kind of, that's just good, interesting, technical, theological language.

[17:49] It's a bit irrelevant, but these are not weird, irrelevant religious concepts. These terms, prophet, priest and king, they are describing the biggest influences on your life.

Because everybody has a prophet or prophets or priests or kings, but the chances are you've chosen the wrong ones.

So people choose the prophetic voice of social media, of secular ideology, of capitalist marketing or maybe the most powerful one of all, they choose the prophetic voice of what other people think.

And all these voices around us influence us and shape us in our lives. People choose priests, but they choose priests that will ask you to sacrifice the wrong thing.

So the priest of get to the top of your career will ask you to sacrifice precious time with your family.

The priest of pornography will tell you to sacrifice your personal purity.

[19:02] The priest of more money will tell you to sacrifice your contentment with what you have.

And people choose the wrong king, so we allow ourselves to be ruled by possessions or money or opinions or anxieties.

And yet these kings, although they'll rule us, they'll never defend us. And we desperately need the real Christ. We desperately need Jesus.

And like Simeon knowing that the Christ was coming and had arrived, do you know, do you know that He has actually come? And now maybe you say, well, of course I do.

We're here, we're celebrating Christmas. We know that Jesus was born, but that's not really what I mean. What I mean is, do you know that Jesus has come here today to meet with you?

Jesus has come here today to meet with you. That is why we are doing what we are doing. That is why we meet together every week. We're not maintaining some weird, nice tradition.

[20 : 06] We are here to encounter the risen Jesus, to hear His voice speaking to us in His Word, to have our hearts and our minds helped and nourished and taught by Him.

He has come, He has brought you here today to meet with you. Do you know that? Do you even think that? Do you know that He is for everyone, just like Simeon knew?

Do you know that He's for everyone? Now, when I say that, I don't really mean to you and Jenta, because I don't think that you're struggling with that question. What I mean more is that He is for everyone, no matter your circumstances, no matter how you are feeling, no matter how much you feel like you've messed up, no matter how much you may be doubt or question things, no matter how much you feel you have let God down in your life.

Now, He's still for you, still for you and always will be.

Do you know that ultimately everybody will rise or fall before Him? Ultimately everybody will rise or fall before Him.

[21 : 20] And that's a core aspect of what we believe. We believe that Jesus is the ultimate reality, the ultimate explanation of why everything else exists and the ultimate destiny towards which everything is being drawn.

We will all stand before Him, we will all rise or fall before Him. And if we exalt ourselves now and think, I don't need you and reject Him, then we'll fall.

If we bow before Him now and trust Him, then we will rise. And if you do the second one of those things, then you're safe to die if you do the first you're not.

And as Simeon knew that suffering lay ahead, do you know that that agony of Jesus' death is the key to eternal life? That sword that pierced Mary's soul, that cross that crushed Jesus' agony, that cross is the key to our salvation.

That's what the whole of Christianity centres on, the death and resurrection of Jesus. It is through that that we are saved. And maybe you're aware of that, I'm sure you're aware of that, but do you really know it?

[22 : 38] Do you really depend on it? And this is such an important thing to think about because if you are in that position where many people in our community are, where you are not sure whether or not you're a Christian, this will tell you.

Can you look at the cross and think, I know that that was for me. And I know that that's my only hope for eternity.

And you can leave aside everything else about whether you know enough, whether you're good enough, whether you've stuffed up a lot or a little or whatever else. All of that irrelevant, irrelevant.

If you can look at the cross and say, I don't know everything and I probably never will, but I know that that was for me and I know that that's my only hope.

If you can say that, you are a Christian. If you can say that, you are a Christian.

[23 : 42] Do you know what Simeon knew? And then for our usual five minute rush at the end, let's look at what Simeon didn't know.

I want to suggest three things that he didn't know. The first two, I'm actually not totally sure if he knew them or not, but I'm just suggesting the third one he definitely didn't know.

So first of all, I don't think that Simeon knew just how bad the suffering would be. So he knew conflict lay ahead. He knew a sword was going to pierce me. So in fact, the word he uses is the word for a big sword.

So he didn't know that there was going to be bad suffering, but I don't think he knew just what that conflict and suffering would involve. We know more because we can read about what happened next.

We can read about how Jesus was betrayed by one of those who were closest to him, one of his closest friends. We can read about how Jesus' sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground

as he prayed in the garden.

[24 : 44] We can read of the crown of thorns being pressed into his head. We can read of his back being whipped with a scourge. We can read of him being hit and spat upon and mocked. We can read of him being nailed to the cross, hung there to die in agony as slowly as possible.

We can read of him crying out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? We know much, much more than Simeon, but we don't know it all either.

Because the cross took Jesus to the very depths of physical pain and spiritual agony. Because the truth is that on the cross, he wasn't dying his own death, he was dying our death.

He was taking all the punishment for our sins. He experienced all the agony of eternal condemnation in hell, the agony, the sorrow, the emptiness, the distress, the darkness, the horror. It is all placed on Jesus. It's all beyond what I can imagine or describe. We don't know what it was like.

[25 : 52] We just know who it was for. It was for you. I don't think Simeon knew just how bad the suffering would be.

I also don't think that he knew just how big this baby would be. Now, I don't mean whether he was seven pounds or eight pounds or whatever else we guess like that. I mean, big as important. So he knew that this baby was the one that they'd been waiting for and praying for and longing for. He knew it was the Christ, but I'm not sure he realized that as he held this baby, he was holding God, the Son himself.

I'm not sure he would realize that the man that this baby grew into would be the image of the invisible God, the radiance of his glory, the exact imprint of his nature, the one through whom all things were created, the one who upholds the universe with the word of his power.

I'm not sure that Simeon realized that this baby had come to inaugurate God's kingdom, to build the church, and that the lives of millions and millions of people would be utterly transformed by everything that this child would accomplish.

[27 : 03] I'm not sure that Simeon knew that 2,000 years later and 3,700 miles away, people would be gathering on the first day of the week in a village called Carlaway because they want the first thing that they do as a new week begins to meet in the name of this baby, to worship and praise him for everything that he has done.

We know more than Simeon did. And so we can look at the rest of the New Testament, we can look at 2,000 years of church history, we can look at the church across the globe today, and we can look at our own lives and we can see that Jesus has done amazing things.

We know more than Simeon, but we still don't know it all because Jesus is continuing to do his mighty work and there is so much more to come. The risen Jesus has spent 2,000 years totally exceeding everyone's expectations of him and he is not stopping.

And that's why we should be so excited about what Jesus is still doing. We should be so excited about what he will do in the church globally and in our own community here.

Simeon did not know just how big this baby would be. But thirdly, and this is the one I'm definitely sure of, when it comes to Simeon's departure, I am 100% certain that Simeon had no idea just how amazing the destination would be.

[28 : 39] As Simeon says so beautifully in the song, he says, now I can depart in peace. He's ready to die, he's ready for eternity, he's ready to depart.

But at that moment, as he is saying these words, he has no idea just how amazing his destination is going to be.

And this is something that we don't speak about enough. It's something that we don't speak about enough. The fact that heaven is just amazing.

And the Bible speaks of it in such magnificent terms that we just don't think about enough. It speaks of it, most of it, many of these descriptions come in the book of Revelation, speaks of heaven and ultimately of the new creation that God will inaugurate, speaks of a place of majestic glory, the holy city coming down from heaven, having the glory of God, it's radiant like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.

If anyone here has got a diamond on their finger, look at it, it's a glimpse of the glory that's been described here. A place of astounding beauty.

[29 : 53] Again, you've got this language using precious stones that are in the world, describing God's city, pure gold, like clear glass, jasper, sapphire, agate, emerald, onyx, carnelian.

I only know what some of these actually look like, but all of these are the most precious, beautiful minerals that we find in the world around us.

It's a place of magnificent togetherness, behold, a great multitude that no one could number, every nation, all tribes, peoples and languages.

Just think of that, you think of how much awful division and hostility and racism and hatred and all sorts of awful stuff you see in the world today, and you just see this beautiful image of everyone together in such marvellous unity.

It's a place of perfect healing, no more mourning, no more crying, no more pain, every tear wiped away.

[31 : 08] A place of unspoiled holiness, nothing unclean will ever end to it. You think of all the ways in which people's lives are wrecked in this world by stuff that is unclean, stuff that is wrong.

It's none of that there. A place of thrilling worship. You have this image that John describes of a multitude of myriads and myriads, thousands and thousands, all crying out with one loud voice, worthy as the lamb who was slain.

Every time, if you are in a situation where you are in a massive crowd singing, sometimes we get that in church, but today not enough people come to church.

You get it at football, you get it at concerts, you get massive crowds singing and it's like the earth is shaking. That's what the worship in heaven is going to be like.

And it's a place of unending love where nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus. And everything good that we have in our lives now is a glimpse.

[32 : 21] And for me, this is one of the ways. This for me is one of the biggest proofs that Christianity is real, that what the Bible says is true and that all of this is a reality.

The fact that everything that is good in our lives now is a glimpse of this ultimate reality. And so just think of this week, so much of this week is going to be good.

There's good food, arts. This is the best eating week of the year and I can't wait. And so much time together where life slows down, we're with family, we're with friends, so much happiness, so much fun.

You see children's faces light up, we get to enjoy the best of music. Well, sometimes the music is terrible, but on the whole good music, you get the good music. You get to enjoy great things like the arts, you get good Christmas movies, sit with a book, all that kind of stuff.

There is so much this week that is so good. You have an ultimate, diametric choice in terms of your worldview.

[33 : 29] Either all of that goodness that you will experience this week is an illusion. And it means nothing ultimately. Or it's a glimpse of the God who has given us so much that is good and who promises us an eternity where it will be even better.

And who is the one where we find ultimate explanations for everything that we see and around us and everything that we know is real and true in our hearts.

Sin was ready for his departure, but he did not know when he sang this song how good it was going to be, but he knows now.

And right now we can't stretch our minds far enough to imagine the joy and peace and security and beauty and wonder of what God has prepared for those who love him.

But if you are trusting in Jesus, or if you put your trust in Jesus today, even the most simple childlike trust in Jesus, if you put your trust in him, then you will find out too.

[34 : 43] And surely, surely, surely that's the departure that you want.

Surely that's the departure that you want. And so Jesus is just holding out his arms to you again and saying, look, come with me.

Jesus is born to transform our departure. Amen.