

## *The Old Man at the Temple*

### *Luke 2:21-35*

The carpenter from Nazareth was careful man, accustomed to exact measurements. So he thought the trip through before he and Mary set out.

He knew his bride would not be able to travel for a while. So he took his tools with him.

He all but forgot about them in the stable, though. His heart ached to see Mary writhe on the straw as labor pains swept over her. Then the shepherds came. Their eyes alive and their faces lit up, they told about the angels who had visited to them.

When dawn finally bled on the edges of the little clouds that skimmed the mountains of Moab, Joseph remembered his tools. He let Mary sleep and walked the steep, cobbled streets knocking on doors.

He found a woman who needed kitchen cabinets. And a blacksmith had a cart with rotting, splintered wood that needed to be replaced.

Later that day, Joseph found a clean room where his little family could stay. And exactly one week and one day later, Joseph and Mary took the baby boy to the village rabbi.

*And when eight days had passed, before His circumcision, His name was then called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb. Verse 21*

Then Mary took little Jesus back to their room. And Joseph went back to work.

Mary was stronger, and the baby was healthy. But they still could not return to Nazareth.

The Law of Moses commanded new a mother to be kept in serene seclusion, hidden away at home with her baby for more than a month.

*And when the days for their purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord... Verse 22*

The Law also required that sacrifices be made forty days after a child's birth. So Joseph rose early that morning. He saddled a donkey and padded its back with blankets. Then with Mary cradling the baby, they walked down the hill and out of town. Soon Jerusalem rose up before them as they plodded past fields and meadows.

Threading and weaving their way through narrow lanes and up steep, cobbled streets, they made their way across town. Finally, they left the donkey behind and walked the wide steps up to the temple mount.

### *Picture of a Saint*

At first glance, the old man looked like he was asleep. But Mary knew he was not. His lips were moving. With a wispy white beard, he stood, swaying and murmuring prayers in the shadow of a pillared porch.

But when the country carpenter and his young wife passed, the old man's head snapped up. And a light gleamed in his eyes.

The old man's face was lined like old leather. And his knees were gnarled. So his step was slow.

But he hobbled along, trying to hurry. He knew he must not lose sight of the young couple. He had waited the balance of a long lifetime for this moment.

*And there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Spirit was upon him. Verses 25*

Life was a ritual for Simeon. He was a careful, cautious man. But his obedience to God's Law was more than meticulous. It was deep with devotion and earnest, emotional and alive.

He obeyed God as our Heavenly Father would have all of His children to serve Him. Simeon walked through his days at Jerusalem in close communion with his God. He shared his cares and concerns with Him, and praised Him for every blessing and benefit.

He called himself God's slave. And he referred to God as his Lord and Master, the King and Captain of his every thought and deed.

There was a beautiful balance to Simeon's simple walk with God. He loved his Lord absolutely and served Him humbly. And He did so by carefully keeping the commandments God's Word details.

Limiting ourselves to either of those two twists and torments our Christian faith. If we serve God with careful, complete obedience alone, we are like the Pharisees. We are white-washed mausoleums, clean and white on the outside but full of death and decay on the inside.

And the opposite is no better. If we focus all our efforts on loving our Lord with deep devotion yet are haphazard and hit-or-miss about obeying Him, Jesus said we do not really love Him at all.

*If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. John 14:15*

If we really love Jesus, we must do as Simeon did. He gave his whole heart to both. He loved his Lord intensely and obeyed Him both carefully and completely.

But the old man's life went beyond love and obedience. His devotion to God also had a grand and glorious focus.

*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. Verse 26*

Simeon knew all the old prophecies. Stretching back to Eden, God's Word spoke of the coming of Christ, the Anointed One God would send as Savior and Deliverer.

Those promises were more than dry doctrine to Simeon, too. Since he was a young man, his one desire in life was to look upon the face of the Messiah. That was the point of his every prayer and all his praise.

Simeon longed for Christ's first coming. And in much the same way, we are to long and look for our Savior's second coming.

*...there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.2 Timothy 4:8*

Jesus said desire for His return is to be included in our prayers. When He gave us what we have come to call the Lord's Prayer, He told us we are to open our prayers with both praise and a plea for His coming.

*Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come.'* Matthew 6:9-10

Simeon followed Joseph's family through the smoke and noise and confusion of the outer courtyard past the arched doorway into the court of the women. Finally, he caught up with them.

We do not know how the old man introduced himself to Joseph and Mary. But somehow he persuaded them to allow him to hold the child. And when he did, a wave of ecstasy sent tears streaming down his face.

*And he came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to carry out for Him the custom of the Law, then he took Him into his arms, and blessed God, and said, "Now Lord, You are releasing Your bond-servant to depart in peace, according to Your word; For my eyes have seen Your salvation," Verses 27-30*

Long years earlier, God's Spirit had assured the old man that he would see the face of the Messiah before he died. And after a long life, he finally did just that.

Simeon looked down upon the face of the baby and smiled. God had been as good as His promise. Now the old man was free to die.

But he did not speak of dying. He knew that death was not the oblivious end of his existence. So he spoke of departing not dying.

Simeon felt no sorrow or regret as he faced his final days. And neither should we if we love and long for our Lord.

He had lived his life for the Lord and for Him alone. He had served the God of his fathers. And He had centered his every hour and every effort upon Christ, the promised Messiah.

He was not tied to this world and this life by any loyalties or longing. So death was little more than a doorway leading to the presence of God. And more than anything, that is what every believer longs for.

*...we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord. 2 Corinthians 5:8*

Still, Simeon knew he was on this earth for a reason. Like Paul, he knew his only purpose for waking up in the morning was to serve the Lord he loved.

*I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake. Philippians 1:23-24*

Death held no sting for Simeon; it was a blessing. And if we love and long for Jesus Christ, it will be a blessing for us, too.

## *Power of the Savior*

The Holy Spirit's work in Simeon's life was both complete and comprehensive. He started by giving the old man an intense longing to see the Messiah. Then when the day came for that desire to be realized, the Spirit directed the old man to the baby.

And God was so careful not to leave His work undone in Simeon's life, He also gave the old man a glorious message about the Savior who slept in his withered arms.

*...my eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light of revelation to the gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel. Verses 30-32*

Simeon knew that when the baby in his arms grew up, He would bring salvation from slavery to sin and freedom from death, despair, and defeat. And the old man also knew God would not limit those blessings.

Salvation would be the glory of any Jew who chose to trust in Christ. And He would be a light, illuminating the darkness and decay of the wasted lives of those who had never even heard of God's goodness.

Simeon longed for the Messiah because he knew Christ would bring consolation to God's people. And so He does. Isaiah called him a Wonderful Counselor: One who is meek and lowly and offers us rest.

Before the old man handed the baby back to Mary, Simeon spoke some words which the young mother did not understand until years later.

*And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed—" Verse 34*

Inspired by God's Spirit, Simeon spoke words that sounded strange. The child would cause some to fall and others to rise.

Many would oppose the Messiah with bitterness and loathing. When Jesus was grown, He would speak to great crowds of people on grassy hillsides and in crowded market places.

He would tell stories of lost sheep and lost sons. He would tell people how God seeks them like a shepherd and longs for them like a father.

But in every crowd there would be some who listened with folded arms and icy eyes. Cold and callous, they would not merely refuse to believe what God's Son had to say.

They would seethe with jealousy and hatred for Him. They would pepper Him with pointed questions and try to lay traps for Him, too.

But that is not all. They would also stoop to lies, blasphemy and bribery. And in the end, they would plot to have Him savagely murdered.

That has not changed since our Savior returned to His Father, either. Men still oppose our Lord. Not content to refuse the Gospel and go their own way, they work to keep others from trusting Jesus.

And even that is not all. Over the years and continuing today, some men harbor such hatred for Jesus, they torture and torment, imprison and persecute those who trust in Him. But we must not be surprised by that. Our Savior warned us that would be the case.

*You will be hated by all because of My name, Matthew 10:22*

*Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; John 15:20*

However, we are not to reflect that hatred back to those who oppose and persecute us. They are in the very act of falling. They are falling prey to sin and Satan. And very soon one day, they will fall into the hands of an angry God. So we are to love them and pray for them.

*...love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, Matthew 5:44 (NKJV)*

When Jesus spoke, some people did oppose Him. But others soaked up His light and found a new life. Derelicts, drunks and demoniacs found forgiveness and freedom. The lost and the lonely found a Friend. And those who were drowning in despair, disease or disability found a new life of power and purpose.

The Savior lifted them up. They were among those Simeon said would rise. They rose up from slavery to freedom, from sin to forgiveness, and from death to life.

They were like those who trust Jesus today. Although they were once deep in sin, they were lifted up and seated in the very halls of heaven.

*God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, Ephesians 2:4-6*

That is not all, either. One day we who claim Christ as Lord and Savior will depart just as Simeon did. And angels will carry us far away from this earth to the shining city God has prepared for His children.

We must not be misled. There is no middle ground. Some will fall and others will rise. No one will be left in the middle.

Christ once confronted some unbelievers, men who were falling out of opposition and hatred of Him. So, quoting prophecies from both Psalms and Isaiah, Jesus outlined the choices that are left to men.

*Jesus said to them, "Did you never read in the Scriptures, 'The stone which the builders rejected, this became the chief cornerstone; this came about from the Lord, and it is marvelous in our eyes'? Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it. And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust." Matthew 21:42-44*

Isaiah said it best. God's Son is like a great stone. Either we will fall upon Him, or He will fall upon us.

If we choose to cast ourselves upon Christ in faith, He will shatter our sinful, selfish spirits. He will break our bonds and loosen us from our chains. And we will be forever free.

But if we refuse to cast ourselves upon Christ in commitment, confidence and consecration, we cannot avoid the penalty. He will fall on us, not as a loving Savior but as a stern Judge.

And we will be ground to powder, absolutely and utterly overcome. In this hour, many people proudly refuse to trust in Jesus and live as His faithful servants. But they too will one day proclaim that He is Lord.

*...at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philipians 2:10-11*

But that, Paul wrote to the church at Rome, will come when Christ sits as Judge over all men. And then it will be too late.

So we are left with a choice. We can call Christ Lord now and live. Or we can do so in tears and terror when it is too late to be saved.

### *Price of Salvation*

There was also an icicle of pain in Simeon's words to Mary. They were an advance warning of an inexpressible sorrow that would one day engulf her.

*...and a sword will pierce even your own soul — to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed. Verse 35*

The word Luke used for a sword refers to an enormous broadsword. One day, not far from the spot where Mary stood with baby Jesus in her arms, she would stand at the foot of a Roman cross and look upon the battered and beaten face of her beloved Son.

But that which brought such unspeakable sorrow to Mary breathes life and light and love into our hearts. So we do not grieve over our Lord's death or sorrow over the cross where He hung.

We glory in it! Our Savior came and died the death we deserve. He paid the full and final price for our sin. He died that we might live. We revel and rejoice in that. And in absolutely nothing else.

*God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, Galatians 6:14 (KJV)*

One day we who trust in Jesus will gather around His throne. And with shouts and songs, we will praise Him as the Lamb of God who laid down His life for us.

*And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, "To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever." Revelation 5:13*

The cross of Christ is the only message that matters to those who are still chained in the darkness. And it is our mission in life to tell everyone the wonderful story of God's love.

You see, it is more than mere history that Jesus died for us. It is the one and only path to a life like Simeon lived.

A man who was glad to live and glad to die.