

The Lesson of Simeon
Luke 2:22-40
February 2, 2014

When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord"), and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons." Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too." There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem. When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him.

Everything about Jesus' birth is significant; the impossibility of a virgin birth, the incarnation of God into man, even the city of Bethlehem. There are numerous facets to this miraculous event. Generally, at Christmastime, our attention is focused on Jesus, Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, Herod, the Wise Men, or the angelic choirs.

However, the Christmas story is somewhat incomplete without Simeon. Simeon was a man tremendously devoted to his God. Simeon was old, but his advanced years hadn't diminished his faith.

Unlike Abraham, whose faith faltered when his promised son didn't arrive on his schedule, Simeon spent years in hopeful expectation of the fulfillment of God's promise – he would not die without seeing the Messiah with his own eyes. Simeon was a man of unshakable faith.

Simeon has three lessons for us 21st century Christians to learn.

First, **Simeon was a Spirit-led man.** Simeon wasn't his own man – he was God's man. Simeon went where the Spirit led. Simeon did what the Spirit wanted. The text tells us:

Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him (Lk 2:25 NIV).

Simeon followed God. That's what it means to be righteous and devout. He patiently believed in God's promise of a Savior. In short, Simeon was a true believer. The reward for his faithfulness to God was the Holy Spirit was on him. It was by the power of the Holy Spirit Simeon could be the man he was.

Does that statement make you a little jealous of Simeon? Don't be. The same Holy Spirit lives in all true believers today. When someone totally offers his or her life to God, God responds by taking up residence in that person's heart and soul. The result of such indwelling is now that person can live the faithful life of Simeon.

Because of his close relationship with God, Simeon received a revelation from God. Again, are you a little jealous? Would you like a revelation from God? You have one. God reveals everything to us we need to know. He does this through Scripture. The Holy Spirit speaks to us through God's Word. We don't need tea leaves, horoscopes, or even special prophets to know what God wants us to know. Everything we need is in his Word.

Paul tells us that: *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness* (2 Ti 3:16 NIV). These four aspects of God's Word are all we need.

The teaching that comes from Scripture shows us what is right and true. Scripture teaches us who God is, who we are, who our Savior is, how the world came into being, what is the reward for the faithful, and what is the punishment for the wicked. There are no important facts the Bible does not reveal.

The rebuking from the Scripture shows us what is wrong. God clearly spells out what displeases him and what is harmful to us. There's no need to ever wonder what God expects us to avoid, he put it in writing.

The correcting that comes from Scripture teaches us how to "get it right." There is no secret to leading a God-pleasing life. As you search his Word, God will show you the path he wants you to walk.

The training in righteousness that Scripture provides shows us how to stay on the right path. God not only tells us how he wants us to live, he also shows us. The life of Jesus is the perfect example of how to live a righteous life.

There is one more important aspect of the relationship between Simeon and the Holy Spirit. The text says: *Moved by the Spirit, [Simeon] went into the temple courts* (Lk 2:27 NIV).

It has been said in most all situations we know the right thing to do – the hard part is doing it. In the same way, there is a huge difference between knowing what God expects from you and doing it. Simeon not only heard the Holy Spirit, he followed the

Holy Spirit. He allowed the direction of his life to be set by God. When God spoke, Simeon moved. The Bible promises us: *Live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature* (Ga 5:16 NIV).

The second lesson from Simeon is **he was a salvation-enlightened man.**

Simeon's close relationship with God's Word and with the Holy Spirit meant he understood God's plan. People who understand God's plan for mankind live with a different attitude toward life. True believers have the peace that passes all understanding. True believers don't grieve as those who have no hope. True believers look to the future with hopeful anticipation not anxious fear and dread.

If you take a close look at Simeon's prayer, you can see both his confidence in God's control of the future and his knowledge of what God has planned for his Creation. Listen again to Simeon's prayer, this time from the King James Version: *"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; A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel"* (Lk 2:29-32 KJV).

The first part of Simeon's prayer expresses a trust in God few people have. Simeon was prepared to leave this world in peace. He could do so because he knew his future was secure. Simeon knew when he stepped out of this world he would be stepping into the arms of his loving Heavenly Father.

The second part of Simeon's prayer showed his understanding of God's will for humankind. He knew God had prepared a way for sinful people to come back to him. Furthermore, he knew the way back to God wasn't a secret, it was the baby boy he was holding in his arms. It was the fulfillment of the promise made to Adam and Eve after their sin in Eden.

The third lesson we can learn from Simeon is **he was a Scripture-learned man.** Simeon's understanding of what Jesus' birth meant showed he hadn't just read God's Word, he had studied God's Word.

Listen to what Simeon said to Mary: *"This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."* (Lk 2:34-35 NIV).

Simeon had studied the prophets who had foretold of the Messiah. He knew the impact this baby would have on the Jews. If he had lived longer, he wouldn't have been surprised to find that most of the Jews, the people who had waited 4000 years for their Savior, would turn their backs to Jesus and call him a fraud. Simeon would have nodded knowingly to see only a few people who called themselves God's people were actually God's people.

Simeon also knew, as God's promised Savior, Jesus would die for the sins of the world.

How did he know that? Was it by special revelation from God? In a way, yes. Listen to some parts of Psalm 22.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, and am not silent. But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by men and despised by the people. All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads: "He trusts in the Lord; let the Lord rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him." I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted away within me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death. A band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet. I can count all my bones; people stare and gloat over me. They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing. You who fear the Lord, praise him! All you descendants of Jacob, honor him! Revere him, all you descendants of Israel! For he has not despised or disdained the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help. (Ps 22:1-2, 6-8, 14-18, 23-24 NIV).

Simeon knew about Jesus' crucifixion because God's Word explained it to him. He didn't need a special visit from an angel. He only needed to study Scripture.

So let's do a little self-examination. Let's compare ourselves to an old man who, in God's opinion, was important enough to be included in the account of the Savior's birth.

Are you Spirit-led? When you feel the tugging of the Holy Spirit, do you go where he wants – without question? Or do you stop and apply a little human reason to see if what God is prompting you to do is a good move from a worldly point of view?

Are you salvation-enlightened? Do you fully understand God's plan for sinful mortals? If someone asks, can you explain how God has planned since before the creation of the universe, to come to the rescue of the people he loves so much?

Are you Scripture-learned? Saint Peter tells us to: *Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have* (1 Pe 3:15 NIV). Can you explain what you believe and why you believe it? Have you studied God's Word to the point it has become your default setting for all you do and say?

Those are hard questions – not hard to know the answers, but hard to face the answers. We're in the early part of a new year. If your spiritual life looks a little weak compared to Simeon's life, take heart. All the strength you need to have the faithful walk of Simeon is only a prayer away.