

Our Consolation

Luke 2:25-32

Growing up and participating in a number of different sports where tournaments were involved, it was customary to hand out a consolation prize to the non-winning team. The dictionary defines a consolation prize as a prize given to a runner-up or a loser in a contest. My first big cross-country race was in 9th grade. Competitors from class A, B, C, and D sized schools lined up to run the 3-mile race on a golf course near Delta College. I couldn't tell you how many runners there were, but there were a lot. I ended up finishing in 35th place. Not too bad considering I had just taken up the sport and this was my first big race. For my efforts I received a black ribbon with gold lettering that said "participant". It's tucked away in a box in the attic. Not everyone got a ribbon. Those in the top 5 or 10 probably got a different ribbon or medal. But mine simply said participant, which being loosely interpreted meant. "You did a pretty good job, but weren't quite good enough."

Maybe you've received a consolation prize sometime in your life. Perhaps it was in 4-H, or some competition in school like choir or debate.

When we come to our text today in **Luke 2:25-32**, and we read that word consolation, maybe it conjures up some old memories of getting a feel good prize just for trying. But the word in this passage has a different meaning than what we might associate it with when prizes are handed out. Let's consider that word today.

During this Christmas month we have been looking at the account of Jesus's birth. We pondered first what it means that He is our Christ. The term Christ in the Greek is equivalent to the term Messiah used in the Old Testament and simply means anointed one. It was used of priests and kings.

The angel announced to the shepherds that the long-awaited Christ or Messiah was born that night. They could go and see Him, in Bethlehem. To identify Him, they would find the baby wrapped in strips of cloth and lying in a manger. The angel also said that

this Christ was the Savior.

Based on the response of the shepherds we considered last week our call. Like the shepherds, we have a call to also be a witness to the birth of Christ, to be a witness that Christ came to save us from our sin, to be a witness whose response is also one of worship. I suggested last week that our witness is a form of worship as we testify to the salvation we receive through Christ. When we witness, we are worshipping. When we worship, we are a witness of the things we have seen and heard and believed about Christ. I also suggested to you that their faith did not begin the moment they laid eyes on Christ lying there in the manger. Their faith began back on the hillside as they looked forward to the coming of the Messiah and they were privileged that night to have their faith turned into sight.

Some day our faith will become sight when we see the One who was born to save us from our sins. But there are still so many who look for a deliverer. They choose not to recognize or accept that the Savior has already come and it is His birth that we celebrate each Christmas. There are so many who acknowledge the birth of this child and enjoy a festive time of short tranquility. They come together with wishes of good will, but unfortunately they only see Him as a very moral man, a good teacher, a kind and benevolent person. They don't see Him or won't see Him as the Christ, the Savior. They don't accept the possibility that God came down and became a man in the body of a newborn to dwell among us and later on to die for us. They want peace and good will, but won't recognize that peace and good will only come through this Jesus. Many prefer to find temporary peace through a pen or a pill or a possession. Others want peace through force and submission. Still others care nothing for peace and want only anarchy. But there are those who look for joy, who want comfort and long for that inner peace to settle their troubled soul. There are those who are like Simeon who we read about in our text. **What makes Him different from all the others who want only a temporary or earthly peace?** We find it first in his character.

I. SIMEON'S CHARACTER – v. 25a

A woman who gave birth to a son, was considered ceremonially unclean for seven days. According to the law, on the eighth day the son was taken to the priest to be circumcised. For 40 days the mother was considered unclean or impure and couldn't enter the sanctuary. On the 40th day she came to offer her sacrifice to cleanse her from her impurity. We read in **verse 21** that Jesus was circumcised on the eighth day according to the law and it was on that day that He was given the name Jesus. In **verse 22** we read that at the time of her purification they traveled to Jerusalem, again, according to the law.

Forty days was considered the period of her purification. She was to offer a year-old lamb as a burnt offering and a pigeon or dove for a sin offering. We are told in **Leviticus 12:1-8** that if she could not afford the lamb, she could substitute it for a pigeon or dove. We then read in **Luke 2:24** that Joseph and Mary brought two pigeons or doves indicating that they were too poor to bring a lamb.

According to **Numbers 18:14-16**, the first-born son had to go through the religious ritual of redemption. That was also done on the 40th day when Mary would go through the ritual of purification or cleansing. On this day the first-born son was presented to the Lord.

Joseph and Mary had traveled to Jerusalem to fulfill the law of the Lord regarding the ritual of purification of Mary and the ritual of redemption for Jesus.

This is the setting for what happens in our passage where we are introduced to a man named Simeon. We assume he is old because of what he says in the text that he is now ready to die. John Phillips writes that some scholars believe Simeon was the son of the famous Rabbi Hillel. They believe that Simeon was then the father of Paul's tutor Gamaliel. This Simeon became the President of the Sanhedrin in A.D. 13. The Mishna, which tells of the great Rabbis and their achievements, however, ignore Simeon, perhaps because of his belief in Christ. So it's unclear if they are one in the same person.

The name Simeon means hearing or God has heard. In **Romans 10:17** we are told that "**faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.**"

While we can't be certain what some scholars write about the identity of this Simeon, we are certain about some other things about him because we read about them in our text. We learn that he was "**righteous and devout**".

The dictionary defines **righteous** as something you believe to be morally right or virtuous. But in our day of relativism, that could mean so many different things. What's right for you may not necessarily be right for me. What's wrong for you isn't necessarily wrong for me. We truly are living in a day when good is bad and bad is good when man's opinions about what is morally right or fair vary widely depending on who you talk to and what's in vogue at the time. Man's definition of righteous is a moving target.

But the term righteous when used in the Bible is not based on relativism, it is based on absolutes. The Bible teaches us that righteousness is solely based on what God says is right and wrong. Only His standard makes us right in His eyes. When a man came to Jesus one day and asked what he needed to do to inherit eternal life, Jesus said he needed to obey the law. The man said he had done that since a boy. Jesus said he fell short in one area. The man had his own opinion about what made him righteous and Jesus had something entirely different that was based on the entirety of the law.

The simplest answer in defining the term righteous is to be in a right standing with God and that is only possible through faith in Christ.

Old Testament saints like Noah and Abraham were called righteous. It means they had righteousness credited or applied to them by faith. Christ had not yet come into the world and died for them, but their faith was in the atoning work that the redeemer, the Messiah would do on their behalf. They looked ahead to His coming, while we look back at His coming.

Simeon was a righteous man who committed himself to obeying God's Word and living by faith in the coming Messiah, the one who would take away his sins. He sought to live a morally upright life in anticipation of the Messiah's arrival. It would be through the Messiah that righteousness would be credited to him.

His example of living a righteous life in anticipation of the coming Messiah should challenge us to do the same, to go and live a morally upright life as we wait for Christ's return. His life challenges us to live our lives based on the unchanging, absolute, authoritative Word of God rather than living like culture which changes what is right and wrong almost daily, a culture that lives by no moral standard. We could say that Simeon sought to live his life in a way that in whatever he did and said would bring glory to God.

He was righteous.
May that be said of us.

The second character trait we find about Simeon is that he was **devout**. The dictionary defines devout as having or showing deep religious feeling or commitment. For the Christian, I want to add the word conviction, which really helps to define both words, righteous and devout. Without conviction in the Christian life, we will falter and fall. Conviction sets the direction of the moral compass we follow so that we don't deviate from it.

Simeon had moral conviction.

Culture didn't sway him to alter his character. He had a strong commitment to obey the principles of God's Word. It may have come from a passage like **Deuteronomy 6:4-5 “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.”**

That is the essence of being devoted, loving God with everything we have, our will, our emotions, and our intellect. In **Matthew 22:37-38**, Jesus calls it the greatest commandment.

At the dedication of the Temple, Solomon described what it meant to be devoted, the essence of which is obedience.

I Kings 8:61 “Let your heart therefore be wholly devoted to the LORD our God, to walk in His statutes and to keep His commandments.”

Being devoted means we can't be halfhearted in our love for God. Jesus said if we want to be His disciple we must deny ourselves and take up our cross and follow Him (**Luke 9:23-24**). As a devout follower of Christ we commit every part of our life in loving and obeying God. It's not done out of obligation or even to try and win God's favor as if we think we can in some way through our effort earn it. We devout ourselves to God simply because God has given us everything and in return we love Him with everything we have, our whole being. The religious leaders who were around with Simeon were only outwardly devout. They did it for show. Simeon was devout because his heart was righteous. He lived his life as someone who sincerely loved God and demonstrated it through obedience.

Luke is the only New Testament writer who uses this term and it describes the person who is reverent toward God or who is God-fearing. **John MacArthur** writes that **“It conveys the idea of being careful to obey and honor God so as to lead an exemplary life before others.”** The terms righteous and devout are inseparably linked. They mean to be justified and sanctified, to be saved by faith and to be growing in that faith.

Christmas is a great time to reflect on how righteous and devout we are in our faith. We are given a glimpse into Simeon's character. This character shows us what was of concern to him.

II. SIMEON'S CONCERN – v. 25b

“He was waiting for the consolation of Israel.”

The Old Testament, in passages like **Psalm 27:14**, we are told to wait on the Lord. Our passage tells us Simeon was waiting for the promised Messiah. As a righteous and devout man, Simeon was waiting with anticipation for the first coming of the Christ. As followers of Christ, we should be waiting in the same eager anticipation for His second coming. The word **“waiting”** conveys the idea of

expectation, longing, watching. The text tells us what he was waiting for. It was the “**consolation of Israel**”.

It’s a term that means the salvation of Israel, the Messianic hope, the one who had been promised and prophesied about in the Old Testament. On Christmas Eve we will look at the crimson thread in the Old Testament, some of the passages that point to the coming Messiah who was this infant baby born in the manger.

The word consolation comes from the word console. Another word for consolation is comfort. We think of consoling or comforting someone who has experienced some loss, grief or trouble.

When you consider all that the nation of Israel endured in its storied history from captivity in Egypt, through the division of the nation and all the ensuing battles under their many kings, their deportation to and exile in foreign lands and then the hardship under Roman occupation, they were a nation, a people who needed to be comforted. They had seen a lot of trouble. Many in Israel came to believe that the consolation of Israel would be a political deliverer or Savior. He would lead them into battle and rid them of the political oppression under foreign rule.

But there were others, like Simeon, who waited for the coming Messiah because they understood the greater burden they bore, one far greater than the physical and emotional burden of national tragedy and foreign occupation. There was a greater burden from which they needed comfort that only could come from the long-anticipated Messiah. It began near the dawn of time when man’s disobedience resulted in the consequences of sin, that without this Messiah, man would be forever doomed to spiritual death, a consequence from which there is no hope apart from this Messiah.

But sadly, over time, national tragedy turned the hearts of many of Simeon’s countrymen to look for a Messiah who would bring comfort through political rather than spiritual deliverance.

Isaiah the prophet spoke of the Messiah and His ministry of consolation.

“Comfort, comfort My people,’ says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the Lord’s hand double for all her sins.” (Isaiah 40:1-2)

The root word for comfort is used to describe the Holy Spirit who is our Comforter, one who comes alongside us in our time of trouble. The Messiah would bring comfort to His people through the salvation He would offer through His death, burial, and resurrection. Comfort would come to those who looked to have their sins forgiven and their spiritual debt paid.

Simeon’s heart was prepared to receive the Messiah.

Can we say the same?

As Jesus followers, is our heart prepared, ready, and waiting for His return?

If, at this Christmas, you realize who this is that we celebrate, is your heart now ready to receive Him?

If I had a nickel for every time I’ve used the term “I can’t wait”, I’d be a rich man.

I can’t wait for Christmas.

I can’t wait for my birthday.

I can’t wait for vacation.

I can’t wait for dinner.

I can’t wait for this project to get done.

I can’t wait for it to stop raining.

I can’t wait for (and you fill in the blank)

Can I say that about the coming of Christ?

Am I prepared for His coming?

At this Christmas, let’s remember that our consolation has come. It is Christ who has come to save us from our sins. He is mankind’s only hope. Christmas reminds us that the Messiah came and that He is coming again. **John 14** reminds us that He has gone to prepare a place for us with a promise of His return. **II Timothy 4:8** tells us that there is laid up for us a crown of righteousness, that the Lord will award those who have loved His appearing.

The consolation of Israel brings pardon to all who through faith and repentance understand their sin and guilt and need of a Savior. Passages like **Micah 7:18-19** remind us that God's anger does not last forever, that because of His compassion He pardons our sin and forgives our transgression. Micah says our sins will be hurled into the depths of the sea.

The consolation of Israel, is for you today, if you have not received this Christ as your Savior. He stands ready to bring you comfort from your sin. This consolation was not just for Israel, but for Gentiles as well.

A person who is righteous and devout will be concerned about the coming of Christ. We see in Simeon both his character and then his concern. The next thing we see is his consecration.

III. SIMEON'S CONSECRATION – vs. 25c-27

Simeon had the presence of the Holy Spirit on him, that was not typical of the Old Testament believer, who lived by faith. The work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of these saints was different from His work after Christ's death, resurrection and then ascension into heaven. On different occasions, Christ spoke of the coming of the Holy Spirit who would indwell the believer. The disciples were told to look for His coming. In the Old Testament He was with certain people as a helper to do certain tasks. In the New Testament, the Holy Spirit is in all believers.

We are told that the Holy Spirit was on Simeon and that at some point the Holy Spirit gave him the understanding that he would not die before he had seen for himself the Messiah. It's possible that this affirmation by the Holy Spirit only served to heighten Simeon's desire in looking for the Messiah and to further strengthen his godly character because he now understood that the coming of the Messiah would be in his lifetime.

Knowing that Christ is someday going to return should challenge us to live godly lives, because it could be in our lifetime. We are told to expect His return at any time and therefore to be waiting and

watching, ready for His arrival.

Not only was Simeon living by the Spirit and learning from the Spirit, but we are told that he was led by the Spirit. We learn this from **verses 27-28**. **"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."**

Somehow, the Holy Spirit led Simeon to go to the Temple on this particular day at this particular time for a divine appointment. He knew he would see the Messiah, but he didn't know what the Messiah would look like. Unlike the shepherds, who were given two signs, it doesn't appear from Scripture that he was given any external signs at all other than the leading of the Holy Spirit. Prompted by the Holy Spirit, when he saw Joseph and Mary walking through the Temple courtyard he had that AHA moment and exclaimed "that's Him, that's the Messiah we have been waiting for." That's a loose translation of the text.

Unlike the religious leaders, Simeon was waiting for the Messiah.

Unlike the religious leaders, Simeon recognized the Messiah.

Unlike the religious leaders, Simeon received the Messiah.

Unlike the religious leaders, Simeon could now die in peace because he believed in the Messiah.

Consecrated by the Holy Spirit, Simeon was led by the Spirit because he was a righteous and devout man who had been waiting for the consolation of Israel.

Only one thing remains when we have come to the place of seeing Christ for who He is, seeing Him as the One who saves us from our sin. Our response should be the same as that of Simeon. In **verses 28-32** we see Simeon's celebration.

IV. SIMEON'S CELEBRATION – vs. 28-32

There is something truly special about seeing a newborn. The joy exhibited by parents and people

alike, that is until they like spit up or something and then we pass them back to mom.

With joyful excitement, I picture Simeon scooping up baby Jesus in his arms and gazing at Him with wonder while he rejoiced. How his heart must have been filled with awe as he held the Messiah, the hope of Israel, the One who came to be our redeemer. Simeon praised God for keeping His promise because he had seen the Messiah.

I want you to notice that while Simeon was waiting for the consolation of Israel, he understood that this comfort was to be for all people. That's what the angel announced to the shepherds 40 days earlier "**I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.**"

Simeon was saying that this consolation, this comfort, this salvation was not only for the Jews, it was for Gentiles as well. Salvation is for all who call on Christ to be their Savior, who repent of their sin and by faith receive this gift of grace. He has come to lift the broken hearted.

Thirty years later, Jesus would give us an invitation for us to come to Him. "**Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.**" (**Matthew 11:28-30**)

As Simeon indicated in his blessing, so Jesus reminds us that He is the light of the world.

Isaiah 9:2 "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned."

How many people will go through another Christmas, celebrating the season, but never seeing the reason Christ came? May the Lord open their eyes to their need of salvation, may He open their eyes to the light who has come to lead them out of the land of the shadow of death, out of the land of darkness by receiving the gift of eternal life that is only through the consolation of Israel, the salvation that has been prepared in the sight of all people so

that they can truly sing

"Joy to the world, the Lord has come,
let earth receive her king.

Let every heart prepare him room and heaven and
nature sing.

No more let sin and sorrow grow,
nor thorns infest the ground.

He comes to make His blessing flow far as the curse
is found."

Simeon was now ready to die because he had seen
God's promised Messiah.

Warren Wiersbe gives us a sobering thought to consider when he writes "How important it is for people to see God's salvation, Jesus Christ, before they see death."

**Is your heart prepared to die? Have you seen the
Messiah?**

John reminds us that we either have life or we don't have life and this life is only in Christ. He came to offer to all people spiritual freedom and forgiveness of sin. That is indeed worth our celebration at Christmas.

Come, Thou long-expected Jesus,
Born to set Thy people free.
From our fears and sins release us;
Let us find our rest in Thee.
Israel's Strength and Consolation,
Hope of all the earth Thou art;
Dear desire of every nation,
Joy of every longing heart.

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**This Christmas, can you say you have seen Christ?
Do you know God's salvation?
Is your heart prepared to receive Him?
Are you rejoicing because He came?**