

# SIMEON'S JOY

Luke 2:22-35

## DEVOTED EYES

*Luke 2:22-25*

*22 And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord 23 (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord") 24 and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons."*

Mary and Joseph were faithful Jews. They circumcised Jesus on the 8th day and obeyed the Lord in naming their son, Jesus. Now they continue in obedience to follow two separate ceremonies as outlined in God's law.

**The first ceremony** is the purification of a woman forty days after the giving birth to a son.

Birth is a bloody, messy, and beautiful thing — and Jewish law required ceremonial purification. Giving birth is not sinful in any way — but it did require a ritual sacrifice to become ceremonially clean once again.

In the Bible, clean and unclean have more to do with coming into the presence of God. When you were in a clean state you could come into God's presence, but when you were in an unclean state you could not.

Think of voting — In order to vote you have to be registered. If you are registered to vote — then you may vote. If you aren't registered to vote — then you may not.

A person in a state of cleanness is not necessarily more righteous than a person in a state of uncleanness just like a person who is registered is not necessarily more righteous than a person who isn't.

The point is that the clean and unclean laws have more to do with participation in ceremonial worship than a person's moral record. The clean and unclean laws gave direction to all sorts of every day matters like their diet, daily habits, and interactions with others. The laws were meant to show that following God impacts the every aspect of life.

So after giving birth — Mary would have become unclean. Again — giving birth isn't sinful -- but it did require her to go to Jerusalem and offer a purification sacrifice. According to the law this would have been a lamb and a pigeon, but for the poor, provision was made for them to offer two turtle doves or two pigeons instead.

**The second ceremony** is the presentation and dedication of the firstborn to God.

This ceremony and sacrifice was meant to remind them of how God delivered them out of Egypt and spared their firstborns sons. The final plague that broke Pharaoh's back was the death of the firstborn son. But God gave Israel a way to spare their firstborn sons. Every home that believed God's word and sacrificed a spotless lamb — the Angel of Death passed over their home and spared their child.

This ancient ceremony reminded them of their redemption out of slavery and God's provision of grace to spare their sons.

Both of these ceremonies and sacrifices might seem arbitrary and distant to us, but the sacrificial and ceremonial laws had a purpose.

First — The sacrificial system was meant to help them see the reality that a relationship with God actually informs and intersects with every decision we make — from what we eat, to how we interact with others, to the daily habits of everyday life.

Second — The sacrificial system was meant to create a longing in the heart of every Jew for a day when he or she was forever and always clean. It would have created a longing for God's complete restoration and renewal — when every barrier to God's presence would be overcome.

So for these two reasons...Joseph, Mary, and Jesus are in Jerusalem headed to the Temple.

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

We are introduced to a man named Simeon. He is a layman, not a priest, who lives in Jerusalem. Instead of a full background and professional resume, we're told of his spiritual condition. We're simply told he was *righteous* and *devout*, looking for the deliverance of Israel and that the Holy Spirit was on him.

To be called righteous meant that God's word and law mattered to him. He was upright — not perfect — but there was a drive in him to obey God's law. Taken together — righteous and devout — Simeon was a man who walked closely with his God. When we meet Simeon, he's nearing the end of his life.

He's spent his life waiting for the consolation or the comfort of Israel. Israel has been under one oppressive regime after another and the political oppression is eclipsed by the fact that the nation as a whole is struggling spiritually.

There has not been a prophet for over 400 years and they've been waiting for God to send a deliverer...a Messiah to bring about comfort from their oppression. Passages like Isaiah 51:3 would have been stored up in his heart to remind him that God has promised deliverance.

***Isa 51:3***

***Certainly the LORD will console Zion; he will console all her ruins. He will make her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the Garden of the LORD. Happiness and joy will be restored to her, thanksgiving and the sound of music.***

His hope was centered on the coming savior who would comfort the nation of Israel. God had promised that he would send a Messiah and Simeon put his hope and trust in God to fulfill that promise. As a devoted man, his eyes are primed to see The Messiah, The Savior. His eyes are locked into to God and his salvation. He's not looking anywhere else. He knows that if there is salvation to be found, it will be found in trusting in and clinging to his God.

These are devoted eyes. Devoted eyes express love and loyalty and trust. What do you look at with devoted eyes? Where is your love and loyalty directed? Where do you find your safety and comfort? What you are looking to is where your devotion is. The question isn't do you have devoted eyes...The question is...who or what do you look at with them.

Simeon's love, loyalty, and trust were given to the Lord. He was devoted to him. He wasn't looking anywhere else for hope and joy.

## DETERMINED EYES

*26 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.*

Next we learn that Simeon receives a special word from the Holy Spirit. In fact, the name Simeon means, "One who hears." He hears and receives a promise from God that he would not die until he saw the Messiah.

This produced in him determined eyes. Armed with this promise he was determined not to miss The Messiah. He waited patiently for the lord's timing for the fulfillment of his promise and God was enough for him.

*27 And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law,*

Simeon is led by the Spirit to the Temple at the same time that Mary and Joseph are there to offer their sacrifice for purification and to dedicate Jesus to the Lord. He's not loitering or merely hanging out.

*28 he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, 29 "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word;*

The Lord directs Simeon to Jesus and he asks to see the child. We aren't told how Simeon knows that Jesus is the long-awaited for Messiah. We just know that Simeon knew. The Spirit confirms to Simeon that this child is the promised Messiah. Simeon takes the child up into his arms, and he blesses God.

The wait is over. His determination has paid off. His joy is uncontainable and he sings praises to God.

His song is not mundane prose or everyday conversation...this is exuberant joy in poetic verse. He's singing because in his hands is proof that the world's lament will end with comfort and joy. Over the years, he had used his hands to pray and to serve the lord and to be ready to take hold of God's fulfillment. And now...his eyes behold and his hand take hold of Jesus, the Christ, the Savior...the consolation of Israel.

He sings, "Now I can depart in peace." There's no doubt there were hard days for Simeon to stay the course and to believe that God would fulfill his promise. Now he can rest, because in seeing Jesus, he's seen God's salvation.

Only a life marked by determined joy in the LORD can depart in peace. He did not wait in vain because God has been faithful to his promise.

Do you have determined eyes? A determination to stay faithful to the end, anchored by the promises of God — despite our circumstances. We are a people anchored with a promise. Because of Jesus we have the promise that the impact of sin's devastation will be totally and completely dealt with.

Everyone in Christ right now — not later — but right now has had the penalty of sin paid for by the blood of Jesus Christ. Advent celebrates the birth of Christ — but it wouldn't take long for that wood of the manger to become the wood of the cross where Jesus was crucified —not for his sins — but for yours and mine. He wasn't a victim.

No body took his life from him — rather — he laid it down precisely for this purpose — to give his life as a ransom for many. And everyone in Christ has their just penalty for sin — paid for — in full — by the blood of Jesus.

And everyone in Christ — right now — is being transformed from one degree of glory to another — such that the power of sin is progressively weakening.

Ours is not a world where it's only winter and never Christmas as Narnia was once cursed. No — the winter is thawing and giving way to Spring. In spiritual terms — winter is thawing. The curse of sin is weakening and its power over us is progressively loosening. We are no longer slaves to fear and sin. We are children of God and we can pursue holiness and righteousness and indeed we should.

And finally here is our promise — here is why we can be anchored with determination. Christ will come again and bring about the final consolation of the church such that the very presence of sin will be removed so that the lyrics of Isaac Watts in Joy to the World becomes true — “He comes to make his blessings flow — far as the curse is found.”

## **DISCERNING EYES**

*30 for my eyes have seen your salvation 31 that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, 32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.”*

Don't miss goodness and beauty of this truth. Simeon says that in seeing Jesus, he has seen salvation. He's discerning — he's recognizing that Jesus is salvation. Seeing Jesus is seeing God's salvation. These are the eyes of faith. Many people see Jesus and miss him. But Simeon sees Jesus with the eyes of faith.

Think about it. He was told, that he would see the Lord's Christ, but he didn't know how God would bring this about. He didn't know that in his arms he was holding the God who became flesh. He didn't know that this 40-day old baby was also the Ancient of Days. He knew nothing of the incarnation and how this child would conquer death and sin.

All he knew was this child was the Lord's promised Messiah and that the Lord could be trusted with the details of how that would all work out. He saw the child with his eyes, but his faith filled in the gaps. His faith brought spiritual sight to see Jesus. Simeon saw Jesus for who he really is because he had devoted, determined, and discerning eyes.

As he continues to sing — he exclaims that God is not a reactive God. He's prepared. He's a proactive, sovereign God who's directing the course of human history to ensure its salvation. And not only has salvation been carefully designed, it's now ready to be revealed to all peoples — Jews and Gentiles — so that people from every tribe, tongue, and nation will have access to this salvation. Israel was never God's endgame. Salvation was always meant to be extended to everyone — because everyone is in need.

Death is the great equalizer that puts all men and women on equal footing. No matter who you are — no matter you're pedigree or past — no matter you're accomplishments or accolades — everyone has to figure out how to keep the light going when death brings it's final darkness.

Simeon says — God has sent the light of the world to conquer our darkness. Jesus is the light, the breaking dawn into a world of sadness, darkness, and despair.

Jesus is the revelation needed to answer all the deepest questions and longings of the human heart. The only way a weary world can rejoice is because Christ breaks a new and glorious morn. Simeon has discerned where our salvation and hope will come from. There are many pseudo saviors and divergent paths that claim salvation. But there is only one Savior and his name is Jesus.

*33 And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him.*

Simeon's song left them speechless. About a year ago — an angel told them to name the coming child “Jesus” — which means God Saves — because he would save people from their sins. Now through Simeon, God has brought confirmation.

And they marveled, not because they didn't believe, but because they did believe. Did they have all the details? No. Did they have perfect faith? No. No one does. But by faith — they marvel at the Lord's plan and provision of a Savior.

And then before they part ways, Simeon gives Mary a sober discerning prophecy.

***34 And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed 35 (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."***

If we think of Simeon's song in terms of music — we have the first minor chord. Simeon says that this child has been appointed for the fall and rising of many.

What does that mean?

It means that Jesus will be a dividing line in the sand. The offer of salvation is extended to all, but not all will receive it. Each person has to consider the offer and decide if they will receive and believe it. For many the way of the cross will seem foolish and they will reject it. This rejection will lead to their fall. For those who embrace God's salvation, it will lead to their rising.

God's Salvation is on display for all to see. But only those with devoted, determined, and discerning eyes will behold the beauty and grace of this salvation. Then — Simeon tells Mary that a sword will pierce through her soul. He doesn't give an explanation — but from the Gospels we know that as the world rejects Christ — He will increasingly face trials and suffering — eventually climaxing in his crucifixion on a Roman cross.

Watching this happen to her son will be like having a long, double edge sword pierced through her heart. redemption comes at a cost. Peace will come through conflict.

Light brings division. It calls darkness dark and commands it to flee. Those who love the darkness will hate the light. Jesus is the light of the world that brings division. Jesus will be a dividing line in the sand that reveals our heart.

Jesus brings peace on earth that leads to our joy. In his first coming — He is a savior who lays down his life to ransom many. In his second coming — He is a King that we must receive. He removes the curse through judgment — or another way to say it — He brings peace through conflict.

That's the message of Christmas. Jesus brings peace through conflict. Think about it... How do the Allies bring peace to occupied France on D-Day? They invade Normandy!

How does a surgeon bring peace to your body, which has a tumor in it? The surgeon cuts you open and removes the tumor. That's the only way for your body to have peace.

Jesus brings peace on earth to those who receive her king — who have prepared him room.

Simeon is saying... People have to respond to Jesus. There is no neutral non-response. You do not ultimately get to sit on the fence with Jesus. Anything short of full embrace is by definition a rejection of Jesus.

For some Jesus will not be a sign of hope. For those who reject him — He will be a sign of judgment.

Simeon closes with a sobering word. He's saying you have to discern where salvation, joy and hope are to be found. You will have to make a call one way or the other. Eyes by their nature discern one thing from another. Do you have eyes to see the real Jesus and see that he alone is our Joy?

## CLOSING

Jesus was born for your joy. He lived for your joy. He was crucified, died, raised for your joy. And he lives right now so that you would be reconciled to God for your joy. Your eyes were made to look for joy. They are right now casting their gaze at what they think will give you joy.

Are you looking to Jesus?

If you're looking elsewhere...my question to you is...how's that working out for you? Do you find that you have an unshakeable joy? If not, perhaps the object of your joy simply cannot deliver on the joy you were made for.

You see our joy, is only as good as the object of our joy. Anything short of God himself will fall short of the joy you were made for. And if you think that if you go all in on Jesus that you'll miss out on something else, let me tell you that if you look to Christ, you will find unmeasurable joy such that everything else pales in comparison.

Only faith in Jesus Christ can produce the kind of joy you were made for that will ultimately satisfy. Don't settle for anything short of the joy offered to you in Jesus Christ.

We are missing the deep, anchoring, abiding joy that's found in Jesus because we're distracted, dismayed, and delighted by lesser things...Or another way to say it...we are looking for joy in all the wrong places.

Simeon teaches us that there's just one thing you need to see before you die — just one thing you really need on your bucket list. It's seeing Jesus.