

Sermon Text: Luke 2:22-35 ²² Now when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord ²³ (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every male who 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." ²⁵ And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. 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. ²⁷ So he came by 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, 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; ³⁰ For my eyes have seen Your salvation ³¹ Which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, ³² A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, And the glory of Your people Israel." ³³ And Joseph and His mother marveled at those things which were spoken of Him. ³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against ³⁵ "(yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

Sermon Theme: Prepared to Depart this Life in Peace

1. Through the fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies

2. Through the gift of faith to behold and trust in Jesus for salvation.

In the name of the Christ child, the long foretold Savior of all mankind, dear fellow redeemed;

Are you ready to depart from this life in peace? As this question is asked, some might wonder, to whom is this kind of question being directed? Ordinarily, you might expect this kind of question to be posed to someone who is well up in years or who has a terminal illness, because they are nearing the end of their life. Whereas this question is not usually asked of younger people. After all, they have their whole future in this world to look forward to—their life's vocation, getting married and having a family, watching the grandchildren grow up, and enjoying those golden years of retirement.

When we think of the future, how often do we not think in terms of our future days and experiences in this life? And then when it becomes more apparent that our remaining days in this world are numbered, thoughts of departing from this life become more prominent in our minds. Is this the way it should work?

We know from life's experiences that death is no respecter of age. Not everyone lives to be 70, 80, 90 or more years. Although we are living in a day and age that is favorable for a longer life expectancy than in past generations, still it is not unusual to find younger people

dying. We also know from Scripture that this world could be coming to an end at any time with Jesus' unannounced return to this temporal realm. So then, it is not out of line for individuals of any age to reflect on the question of being prepared to depart from this life in peace.

As Bible readers have reflected on Simeon's declaration in today's text, "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace," many have reached the conclusion that this was an elderly man who was speaking these words, especially when taking these remarks together with the Holy Spirit's promise to him that "he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ." Artists picturing Simeon have gone along with the thinking that he was in the latter days of his life.

It is certainly possible that Simeon was in the final stages of his life. However, because the Bible does not give us his age, we can't say this with absolute certainty. What we can say though, is that Simeon was declaring that God had wonderfully prepared him to depart, that is, to be set free or released from this life in peace. This is a great blessing from God that we want for ourselves, for our loved ones, and for all others.

As we meditate on this priceless blessing God poured out upon Simeon, we will be considering how God prepared Simeon through the Messianic prophecies and their fulfillment, and through the gift of faith to behold and trust in Jesus for salvation.

Simeon is one who could be numbered among the Old Testament believers that looked forward to and longed for the birthday of the promised Messiah. He had such an eager anticipation for the coming of that blessed day, because of the many Messianic prophecies which had been revealed in Holy Scripture.

The evangelist Luke points to this concerning Simeon when he writes that this just and righteous believer was "waiting for the Consolation of Israel." The expression 'Consolation of Israel' refers to the promised Savior and hearkens back to such prophecies as the one recorded by the prophet Isaiah where he reveals this word of our Lord, "Comfort, yes, comfort My people!" Says your God. 'Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her, that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned; for she has received from the LORD's hand Double for all her sins.'" (Is. 40:1,2)

We recognize these consoling words in Isaiah as being a part of the prophecy that spoke of John the Baptist preparing the way for the coming of the LORD Jesus. During the advent season we are reminded that this preparatory ministry of John involved a preaching of repentance over sin and then of consoling penitent sinners with the message of God's pardon through His sacrificial Lamb Jesus Christ who takes away the sin of the world.

So then, when we learn that Simeon regarded the baby Jesus as the Consolation of Israel, we can understand why he confidently declared that he had been prepared by God to depart in peace. For knowing that Jesus was his Savior who had come to conquer the enemies of his soul, Simeon knew that none of his past sins and iniquities stood in the way of him entering heaven upon his departure from this life. There is, without any question, no greater comfort in all the world than to possess this kind of peace of mind.

Blessed with this spirit of heart we can walk through the valley of the shadow of death without fearing any kind of evil. The fears and doubts that creep into our minds as the

shadow of death draws near are chased away when we are reminded of how Jesus perfectly and completely fulfilled all that was prophesied concerning Him as our Savior.

Already in the early days of Jesus' life the will of God was being carried out for us. At eight days of age He was circumcised according to Old Testament law. And at forty days of age He was brought to the temple in Jerusalem to do what was required by God's law when the first born was a male child, namely to bring an offering on His behalf.

Through out His entire life Jesus fulfilled all righteousness in our place so that when we come before the judgment seat of God we will not be standing there spiritually naked with all our many sins and failings being exposed. Rather we will be standing there blameless before God being completely clothed with the robe of Christ's righteousness.

We are also comforted in knowing and being assured that we have this blameless standing before God, because of Jesus' all sufficient sacrifice on the cross for our sins. It was this sacrificial death that Simeon was referring to when he alluded to Mary being pierced with painful sorrow in her heart as she would witness her Son suffering and dying at Calvary.

Although Mary would experience this pain of heart, nevertheless she and Simeon and all of us have peace of mind, because Jesus' righteous life and perfect death was for everyone. Simeon said that he was prepared to depart in peace, because of the salvation that God had prepared for all people which included him. Jesus was not only the glory of God's people Israel in that He was promised to come from them and would go to them in order to bring them salvation, but He was also "A light to bring salvation to the Gentiles." Jesus, who is the Light of the whole world, not only caused His message of universal salvation to be recorded in the Bible, but He also saw to it that it would be spread worldwide down through the years. Because of this, the light of His saving grace has shown brightly in our country, in our cities, in our homes, and in our hearts.

This brings us to another very important element of Simeon and we ourselves being prepared to depart this life in peace, namely receiving the precious gift of faith to behold and trust in Jesus for salvation. This is no small gift, especially when we learn of the vast numbers of unbelievers in the years following Simeon who did not know or believe in Jesus. Even the spiritual builders of the Jewish religious community in early New Testament times rejected Jesus as the chief cornerstone of their life and salvation.

Fast forward the scene to our present world and we find a similar situation. It has been reported in the news that of the many who celebrated Christmas a large percentage of them do not acknowledge Jesus as their Savior. Not only that, but there has been a large push to remove any and every Christian symbol or reference to Christianity from the public square. For example, instead of wishing people a Merry Christmas, the opponents of Christianity strongly encouraged individuals to say Happy Holidays. In the public school systems across our country, we hear of curriculums where students are introduced to various non Christian religions. Whereas Christianity is excluded and any reference to Christian observances are either frowned upon or forbidden. While we are not in favor of public schools being in the business of teaching religion, I make mention of this to give yet another example of the hostile climate in our society to Jesus and His teachings.

Whenever the Lord overcomes the inborn hostile nature of sinful man toward God and His Word, and enables him to see through eyes of faith that Jesus is not the enemy, but rather man's best Friend and Savior, we thank and praise the Lord for that. Simeon is a marvelous example of one who was blessed by God the Holy Spirit with the gift of faith. For when Simeon took the baby Jesus in his arms and gazed upon Him, he said that he was prepared to depart in peace, because his eyes saw in Jesus the Lord's salvation. Simeon confidently confessed this, because the Holy Spirit had blessed him with eyes of faith to behold and trust in this little baby as his Savior. Simeon knew by faith that Jesus' redemptive work still to come made it possible for him to be delivered from this vale of tears in the spirit of peace, because the future of heaven was assured to him through Jesus. Yes, even before Jesus lived out His life and died for Simeon he knew that this was as good as done, and that when God would call him out of this world, he would be received into heaven.

In Simeon's case, some might think that he more than others should have been expected to have believed this, because he received special revelations from the Holy Spirit. For it was the Spirit that informed him that he wouldn't suffer death before he saw the Lord's Christ. And then, it was the Spirit who caused Simeon to be in the temple at just the right time in order to see the baby Jesus.

There is no question that this was a special privilege and blessing that Simeon received from the Spirit of God. Yet, like as in all other cases of God blessing man with the gift of faith, the Holy Spirit imparted eyes of faith to Simeon through the Word of our Lord. For Paul declares in Romans, "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." (Rom. 10:17) The Holy Spirit prepared Simeon through the Old Testament Scriptures to behold in the baby Jesus all that He was and all that He would do for his salvation. And so also the Holy Spirit has worked the same gift of faith in us through God's Word so that even though we have not personally seen Jesus or witnessed His redemptive work, we behold Him through eyes of faith as our Savior. Praise be to God for this priceless gift.

Blessed with this same gift of faith we can confidently join Simeon in saying that God has prepared us to depart from this life in peace through our Savior Jesus. May the Holy Spirit continue to preserve this spirit of heart in us through the Word of God so that when our departure finally comes we will be able to enjoy everlasting peace in heaven. Amen.