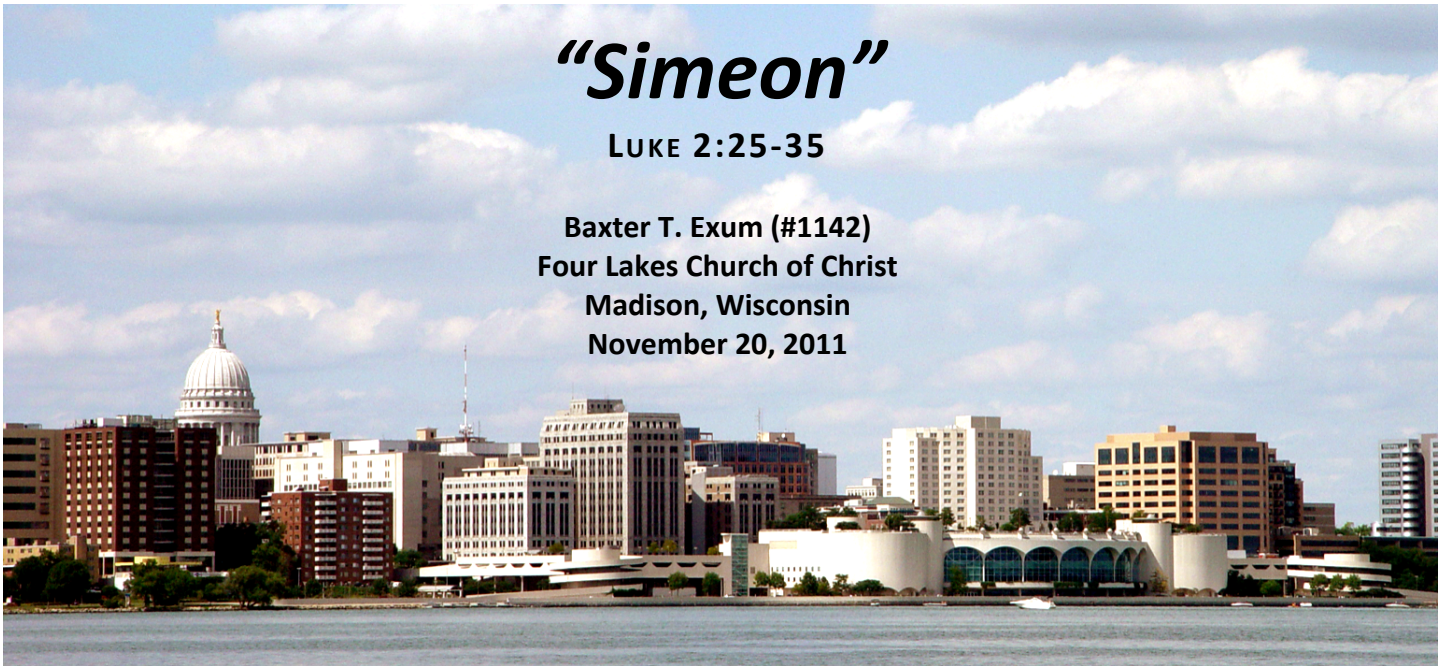


"Simeon"

LUKE 2:25-35

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This morning I would invite all of us to think for just a moment about what we would like to accomplish before we die. Perhaps you have heard this referred to as a "bucket list," a list of things that we would like to do before we "kick the bucket." In my case, I would love to learn how to play the violin. Of course, for me, that is not a very realistic goal at all. I have never played the instrument. However, I have sometimes thought that if I ever have a lot of time on my hands, it would be interesting to learn. Perhaps some people would like to run a marathon. Perhaps some would like to travel to some exotic location. Perhaps some would like to go skydiving or mountain climbing. And maybe others would like to meet some famous person. And all of these things are certainly interesting. In fact, if you have something that you would like to do, I would love to hear about it after the service this morning.

But today I would like for us to focus on a rather obscure character from the New Testament who had a rather unique bucket list of his own. In fact, this man had one thing that he wanted to accomplish in his life so that he could die with at least some sense of satisfaction. I am referring, of course, to a man by the name of Simeon. As some of you might know, the brief reference to Simeon is found in Luke 2, and it is associated with the birth of Jesus Christ. Over the next month or so, we will obviously be seeing more references to the birth of Christ in the world around us, but I would imagine that Simeon will most likely never be mentioned. There is no card with Simeon on it! We might see cards with Jesus, and Mary, and Joseph. We might even see a nativity scene here and there with shepherds and maybe some wise men. However, I would suggest that Simeon was most likely closer in time sequence to the birth of Christ than the wise men. Some people may not realize that the wise men visited Jesus not in the stable, not even when Jesus was a newborn baby, but in a "house" when Jesus was perhaps as old as the age of two. Simeon, on the other hand, comes on the scene when Jesus was only 40 days old. The passage is found in Luke 2:25-35. And the reference to Simeon comes when Mary comes into the temple for purification. The Law of Moses said that when a woman had a son, she had to come in and offer the sacrifice of a one-year old lamb for a burnt offering and a young bird for a sin offering. However, if you notice what Luke says in Luke 2:24, Mary did not bring a lamb. And the reason goes back to Leviticus 12:8, where the Bible says, ***"But if she cannot afford a lamb, then she shall take two turtledoves or two young pigeons, the one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering; and the priest shall make atonement for her, and she will be clean."*** Do we understand what that means? The mother of the Son of God could not afford the sacrifice that the law required. So, because of her poverty, Mary had to take a special exemption. Today, we might say that she and her family would have qualified for the free and reduced lunch program. If

you qualify for that at school, you need to know that Jesus was in a similar situation. But it is in this context that we are introduced to Simeon. If you will, please look with me at Luke 2:25-35...

²⁵ 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. 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 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, ²⁸ then he took Him into his arms, and blessed God, and said, ²⁹ "Now Lord, You are releasing Your bond-servant to depart in peace, according to Your word; ³⁰ For my eyes have seen Your salvation, ³¹ which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples, ³² A LIGHT OF REVELATION TO THE GENTILES, and the glory of Your people Israel." ³³ And His father and mother were amazed at the things which were being said about Him. ³⁴ 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— ³⁵ and a sword will pierce even your own soul—to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."

As we look back over this paragraph of Scripture, I would like for us to consider several very basic lessons from this man who was obviously (according to Luke) ***"holy and devout."*** Over the next few moments, then, I would like for us to ask ourselves why God made sure that a reference to this man's life was included in the Bible. What does this mean for us?

- I. **And with that in mind, one of the first things we notice about Simeon is that he was a man who PATIENTLY CONTINUED TO PUT HIS TRUST IN THE WORD OF GOD, EVEN WHEN IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN QUITE DIFFICULT TO DO SO.**

We find in verse 25 that Simeon lived his life ***"looking for the consolation of Israel."*** In other words, Simeon lived his life looking forward to the fulfillment of God's promise, eagerly looking for the coming of the Messiah. Simeon, of course, had the scriptures that everybody else had. He knew, for example, that the Savior would be born in Bethlehem. He knew that the Savior would be from the tribe of Judah. He knew that the Savior would be the fulfillment of the promise made to Adam and Eve back in Genesis 3. He knew that the Savior would be the fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham. He knew that the Savior would be a descendant of David.

But even more specifically, we find in verse 26 that Simeon had a special revelation, a personal promise, a message from the Holy Spirit that ***"he [Simeon] would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ."*** So here we have Simeon looking forward to the coming of the Messiah, but living through some very difficult times in the history of God's people. By this time, we know that it had been roughly a thousand years since the days of great national power under the rule of Saul, and David, and Solomon. Since those glory days, the nation had been divided. Half was basically gone, and the other half had just barely made it through the Babylonian Captivity. And then, even after returning from captivity, we know from the Bible that God was basically silent (in terms of sending prophets) from the closing verses of the book of Malachi (in the Old Testament) until the coming of John the Baptist, a period of roughly 400 years. During that time, the Jewish people were persecuted and abused by various foreign nations, by the Greeks and then by the Romans. They were kicked around, they were taxed, they were dominated. And we do not know exactly how long Simeon lived through all of this. Tradition says that he was 113 years old at this point, but we really have no way of confirming that. And so in spite of how old or young Simeon might have been here, it is safe to say that he was

living during a difficult time in history, a time when many people might have been wondering whether the Messiah was really coming after all.

Simeon, however, put his trust in God's promise. Simeon put his trust in the word of God. The name Simeon, by the way, literally means "one who hears" or "one who obeys." In Hebrew, the words are the same—it is the idea of "heeding" what is said. It's like when we talk about our kids "listening" to us, we are not just talking about their hearing, but we are talking about how well they obey. That is what the name Simeon means, "one who hears" or "one who obeys." And so in a time of great darkness for God's people, Simeon lived up to his name as he listened to the word of God, as he continued to look for and believe in the coming of the Light. Simeon continued to keep his focus on God. In fact, we can almost imagine Simeon waking up every morning, "Lord, is this it? Is this the day that I get to see the Messiah? Is this the day that I get to meet the Savior?" We can only imagine how Simeon must have gone through each day, walking through the crowds, wondering whether maybe this person over here was the Messiah, or maybe this young man over here—always scanning faces in the crowd, always looking, always hoping. Even in difficult times, therefore, Simeon continued to put his trust in the word of God, living each day as if this could be the day. And again, we do not know how long Simeon had been waiting. It could have been months. It could have been years. It could have been decades. But we clearly get the impression in this passage that Simeon was a patient man. We get the impression that Simeon lived his life expecting and anticipating the coming of the Messiah.

As we think about this kind of anticipation, we think about our situation here in Madison, Wisconsin, more than 2,000 years later. The Messiah has now come and gone, but He has promised to return. Are we looking forward to that day with the attitude of Simeon? Are we preparing for that day to come? Here in south-central Wisconsin, we know what it means to be prepared. Right now, most of us are hopefully prepared for the winter. I know in our family we keep a full-size snow shovel, one in each car, at all times during the winter. We have an emergency bag in each car, a bag with gloves and hats for everyone in the family. At home, the shovels are ready, the ice-melter has been purchased. Today I plan on going out and getting gas for the snow-blower. When we anticipate some big event, we prepare, we look forward to it, we adjust the way we live to get ready for it.

And with this in mind, I would ask: If we know that Christ is coming back, how does that affect us? How does that change the way we live each day? Does it change the way we invest our time, our money, our energy? Hopefully it does! We remember what Jesus said, "***Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness...***" (Matthew 6:33). Let us have the same intensity, let us have the same level of anticipation that Simeon had. Let us wake up each morning saying, "Lord, is it today? Is it today that we get to meet you face-to-face for the very first time? Is it today that we get to have the great reunion with all of our faithful loved ones who have gone on before us?" Let us look forward to the coming of Christ more than anything.

II. There is a second basic idea I would like for us to consider from the life of Simeon, and that is: SIMEON WAS RICHLY REWARDED FOR WAITING SO PATIENTLY.

In verse 27, we find that Simeon "***came in the Spirit into the temple.***" My understanding of this is that in some way the Holy Spirit told Simeon that this was the day. So he goes into the temple, he looks around, and he sees this very plainly clothed young couple holding a 1-½ month old little boy in their arms, they are carrying the sacrifice that a poor family would bring, and Simeon walks over there and takes this little boy, the Son of God, into his arms. What a blessing that must have been, to hold God in your arms! And the Bible tells us that at this point, Simeon breaks out in praise, he "***blessed God,***" the Bible says. And then Simeon says, "***Now Lord, You are releasing Your bond-servant to depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your***

salvation." He refers to the fact that Jesus came not only to save the Jews, but also the Gentiles. Not only did God allow this man to see the Messiah, but he was able to hold the Messiah, to embrace Him in his arms. God always does so much more for us than we could ever imagine!

And what keeps coming to my mind here (again and again) is how normal and how plain, how regular, Mary, and Joseph, and Jesus must have seemed to most people that day. To most people, this was just another young family. To most people, Mary, and Joseph, and Jesus, were just a few more faces in the crowd. But to Simeon, this was the event of a lifetime. This is what he had been living for. This day was the fulfillment of all of God's promises. The seed of the woman crushing the head of Satan (as prophesied in Genesis 3)? That promise was being fulfilled through the baby that Simeon was holding in his arms! And Simeon is nearly overwhelmed. As I see it, Simeon basically tells God that he is now ready to die: Okay, God, you can take me now! The one thing that really matters has now been checked off of my bucket list. In fact, the word "**depart**" (in verse 29) is a word that was used in the ancient world to describe the release of a prisoner. It was used to describe a ship being untied so that it could set sail. The word was used to describe taking the yoke off of an ox at the end of a long day of hard work. Simeon saw the Lord, and he was ready to go. If we could ask Simeon what the greatest day of his life was, I'm sure he would have said that it was the day he finally got to see Jesus. Seeing Jesus was his reward for waiting so patiently.

As we apply Simeon's reward to our situation today, we come to Hebrews 10:35-39, the scripture that Eddie read for us earlier this morning, a passage that was written to a group of Christians who were tempted to give up and give in. In that context, the author of Hebrews said,

³⁵ Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. ³⁶ For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. ³⁷ FOR YET IN A VERY LITTLE WHILE, HE WHO IS COMING WILL COME, AND WILL NOT DELAY. ³⁸ BUT MY RIGHTEOUS ONE SHALL LIVE BY FAITH; AND IF HE SHRINKS BACK, MY SOUL HAS NO PLEASURE IN HIM. ³⁹ But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.

This morning, then we remind ourselves that there is a reward coming for those who stay faithful, and like the reward given to Simeon, it will be a reward far beyond what we could ever imagine.

III. There is a third very basic idea I would like for us to consider from this passage, and that is: SIMEON SHARED A MESSAGE FROM GOD.

Please notice in verse 33, that Mary and Joseph were amazed at the things that were being said about their son, and then in verse 34, Simeon conveys a message that certainly fits in with what the Bible says elsewhere about the coming of the Messiah. Specifically, Simeon says that Jesus has been appointed "**for the fall and rise of many in Israel.**" We remember how Isaiah had prophesied that the Messiah would be a "**stone to strike and a rock to stumble over**" (Isaiah 8:14). This prophecy seems to be alluded to as Paul quotes another passage from Isaiah in Romans 9:33, "**...just as it is written, 'Behold, I lay in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, and he who believes in Him will not be disappointed.'**" And so we see that the Messiah would be like a stone. Some people would stumble over the stone and would be crushed by it, but for other people, He would be like a firm foundation, a cornerstone. And that is what Simeon points out here. Jesus had been "**appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel.**" In other words, the arrival of Jesus would force people to make a decision one way or the other. Either you believe in Him to be saved, or you reject Him to be

lost. The arrival of the Messiah would divide people. And we might say that Jesus continues to be a polarizing figure. We are either with Simeon (and his respect for Jesus), or we are with those who reject the Lord.

At the end of verse 34, notice how Simeon says that this child has been appointed to be ***“a sign to be opposed.”*** The Bible often refers to miracles as ***“signs,”*** and I believe that is the idea here. Even the Lord’s birth was a miracle that would be opposed and spoken against. We remember how the religious leaders were arguing with the Lord, and they said in John 8:41, ***“We were not born of sexual immorality. We have one Father—even God.”*** In other words, the religious leaders were making a reference to the Lord’s virgin birth. The rumor going around was that Joseph was the Lord’s father, that the Lord was born as the result of sexual sin. You see, the Jewish leaders were treating the virgin birth as ***“a sign to be opposed,”*** and Simeon (with God’s help) could see it coming.

But then also, please notice that Simeon has a message specifically for Mary, ***“...and a sword will pierce even your own soul—to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.”*** Mary lived her entire life knowing that her Son would be sacrificed. How hard that must have been. And then, there at the end, remember that Mary was there for the crucifixion. As far as I can tell, Simeon’s words here in Luke 2 are the earliest reference to the crucifixion in the New Testament (in time sequence).

As we apply what happened here to our lives today, I would suggest that people today will also be blessed if we take an opportunity to share the word of God with them. Again, not all of what Simeon said here was very positive, and yet the Bible says that Mary and Joseph were ***“amazed”*** at these things that were being said about the Lord. Simeon, then, took what he knew from the word of God, and he applied it to the events of this particular day. This is something that we can also do today. The Bible tells us in Romans 10:17 that ***“...faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.”*** If our friends and loved ones will ever have any chance of having faith, they need to hear the word of Christ in some way or another. Simeon was a blessing to Mary and Joseph, just as we can also be a blessing to the people in our lives.

Conclusion:

As we close our thoughts on this passage, I would ask that we think back to the idea of a bucket list. What do we really want to accomplish before this life is over? Certainly there are many different things we might want to do, but this morning we have studied a man who was ready to die in peace. This morning I would suggest that if we have a relationship with God, if we have seen Jesus (in a sense), then we are also ready to pass from this life, just as Simeon was ready. Now, this does not mean that we need to die tomorrow, but how comforting that is, to know that we are ready, and that anything beyond today is a bonus. As Paul said in Philippians 1:21, ***“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”*** God made salvation possible by sending His only Son Jesus as a sacrifice for our sins. We respond to that sacrifice with awe. We respond to that sacrifice with faithful obedience. We turn away from sin, we allow ourselves to be buried with Christ in baptism for the forgiveness of our sins, at which time we are born into God’s family. If you have any questions, please ask. But if you are ready to obey the gospel right now, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let’s stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com