

Simeon's Song

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Date: 30 December 2018

Preacher: Brian King

[0 : 0 0] new or passing through, we'll come to the tail end of our Christmas series called the Christmas Playlist, where we've been looking at what is sometimes known as the songs in Luke. And so today we're at Luke chapter 2 verse 21 to 38, and it'll be great if you can keep your Bibles open there. And of course, there's a sermon outline in your bulletin as well that will help you to follow along. Let's ask God for his help.

Heavenly Father, as I bring the final sermon of 2018 today, I pray indeed that you will continue to be at work in all our hearts.

Would you give us the right perspective? Help us to see how you're always working, how you're ever present in our lives. Would you soften the eyes of our hearts and that we might see clearly?

And would you change us that we might live for you and live godly lives all of our days? In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

It's December 20th, 2018, just five days before Christmas. You're looking forward to the holiday on the Greek islands that you've been saving all year for.

[1 : 2 1] Your friend who is travelling with you to the airport is looking forward to finally getting to see her sister overseas in Canada. You get to the airport, laughing and joking all the way there, and you do all the usual stuff.

You go through the security checks, you do the baggage drop, and you go find a cup of coffee. But as you wait and glance at the departure and arrival screens, you begin to notice more and more flights saying delayed or even cancelled.

Your own flight has been pushed back by an hour. Meanwhile, the airport is getting noticeably more and more crowded. Your friend who's on an earlier flight texts you to say, Still stuck on the runway.

Plane not allowed to depart yet. And then the news comes in. Flights in and out of the airport have been suspended. There have been drone sightings.

And all you can do for the moment is wait. It's out of your hands. And if you've been following the news, you know very well that I've just described what happened at London's second busiest airport, Gatwick, in the days leading up to Christmas this year.

[2 : 4 6] Tens of thousands of passengers were stuck at the airport, left wondering what was going to happen to their travel plans after drones were sighted and all flights suspended.

People waited and waited. For some, their waiting was punctuated by uncertainty and confusion.

Wait, wait, wait. Did they say the runway is going to be reopened? No? Am I going to make it to Canada in time? What? They cancelled the flight? Is the airline going to put me on another plane?

Will they refund me? Someone tell me something. For others, their waiting was filled with frustration. Can you imagine having to sit six hours overnight in a plane that never took off, with a three-year-old beside you and a three-month-old in your arms?

Well, that was the experience of one passenger. Others took out their frustration on the police. What do you mean you can't find this drone? How can something so small cause so much disruption?

[4 : 02] And still others simply waited with resignation. Slump on the floor, phone in their hands, trying to escape the nightmare.

And I think what happened at Gatwick Airport that week is a fitting metaphor for life. Much of life is waiting.

And for some of us, that waiting is punctuated with uncertainty. We're hoping and waiting for something to happen. A promotion, or finding vocational fulfillment, a marriage to truly blossom, or something useful to do after retirement.

But we're just not sure if it will actually happen, if it will come to pass. Others of us wait with frustration. I thought I'll be married by now.

Or I'll be financially secure by now. Or that I would have beaten this sin by now. But things haven't changed. And some of us barely wait, but are already resigned to our fate.

[5 : 19] I've missed the boat. I've been waiting for my child to trust the Lord. I've been waiting for help to arrive ever since life got so hard. I've been waiting for God to provide friends ever since I moved here.

I've prayed. I've hoped. I've tried. But it doesn't look like it will ever happen. Waiting is hard. Our passage this morning is filled with people who are waiting.

For some, their waiting is more an everyday kind of waiting. Mary, you see, is waiting. As someone who has just given birth to a son, she is considered ceremonially unclean, according to Jewish law.

So she's more or less confined to home. After her son is circumcised on the eighth day, she has to wait another 33 days before she can visit the temple in Jerusalem to perform the purification rites.

So she has to wait in accordance with the rhythms of her culture. But at least she's clear about what she's waiting for. She knows what's coming next.

[6 : 36] Her waiting is, if you like, ordinary. But that's not the case for the two other people in our passage this morning who are waiting.

One of them, of course, is Simeon. He's based in Jerusalem and he appears to be a man of faith. And verse 25 tells us he's waiting.

More specifically, he was waiting for the consolation of Israel. Now, I wonder, do you know what it's like to wait for consolation?

Just imagine. Your company announces that due to the economic downturn, they are going to have to retrench some people. And the rumour is that your department is on the chopping block.

Although you can't be sure for another week. So you wait. Or you've just gone for a routine medical check-up. But your doctor's a bit concerned because he's noticed an unusual lump on your body.

[7 : 45] And he's ordered a fresh set of tests. But you have to wait. Or perhaps you just had a big fight with your spouse or with your parents.

And they've just stormed out of the house. And you have to wait. And in each case, there's tension. And what you're really waiting for is some relief.

you're waiting for consolation. There's this sense of hopeful anticipation that things will turn out alright. But at the same time, also a sense of fear.

A fear of what if, what if things don't turn out okay. And that's probably how Simeon felt. But what kind of consolation is he waiting for?

He's not looking for good news from his departmental head or his doctor. His is a bigger problem in every sense of the word. He's been waiting, in particular, to see the words of the prophet Isaiah come true.

[8 : 56] Centuries ago, the prophet Isaiah, on behalf of the Lord, brought a court case against his people. Hear, O heavens, he says in Isaiah 1, verse 1.

Listen, earth, for the Lord has spoken. And listen to his prosecution case. I think Isaiah 1 should be on the screen. I reared children and brought them up.

But they have rebelled against me. So, Isaiah 1, verse 4. Woe to the sinful nation, a people whose guilt is great, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption.

They have forsaken the Lord, they have spurned the Holy One of Israel and turned their backs on him. God's people, you see, knew that God alone was the creator and ruler of the whole world.

And they had the privilege of being his covenant partners. People pledged to him. When we get married nowadays, the visible sign of our promises are the rings.

[10 : 14] For God's people, the temple and the city were their signs. The signs of their promises were even more visible.

But they thought, since God has promised his complete commitment to them, since they could see the temple clearly, and since Jerusalem was still standing in all its majesty, well, they could do anything they like.

Isaiah tells us that although they continued their religious commitments, they brought offerings to the temple and so on, they mistreated others, they didn't care for the poor, they put their trust in other political powers and even other gods.

And as a result, God prosecuted them. Judgment came, Babylon conquered Israel, left the city in ruins, plundered the temple.

And the question is, have God's people forfeited their covenant relationship with God? Is this a permanent divorce? Well, no, the prophet Isaiah declares.

[11 : 31] Isaiah chapter 40 marks the turning point. Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sins have been paid for, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

Notice, those are words of consolation. Comfort, comfort. And from this point on, throughout the rest of Isaiah, we hear these words of consolation.

Let's just take one more example from our Old Testament reading this morning in Isaiah chapter 51, verse 3. The Lord will surely comfort Zion and will look with compassion on all her ruins.

He will make her deserts like Eden, her wastelands like the garden of the Lord. Joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the sound of singing.

This is what Simeon is looking for, the consolation consolation of Israel, the consolation of his people, joy, gladness, a return to Eden.

[12 : 57] And that consolation will come from Israel. For Isaiah foretold that it will be the stump of Jesse, from the line of Israel's great king David, who will bring this consolation, this pardon, this sense of freedom.

But the question is, is Isaiah right? Israel isn't under Babylon anymore, but they're now under Rome.

So perhaps Simeon is waiting in vain? And Simeon isn't the only one waiting. In verse 36, we're told of another person.

There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel 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 84.

She never left the temple but worshipped night and day, fasting and praying. and she's waiting for the same thing. At the end of verse 38, it's implied that she's been looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

[14 : 13] In other words, she's been looking forward to the same consolation as Simeon. perhaps, she recited Psalm 130 often, I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in His word I put my hope.

Israel, put your hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is unfailing love and with Him is full redemption. He Himself will redeem Israel from all their sins.

And just imagine how long she's been waiting. We are told that she's been a widow for at least half a century, if not longer. For these people, it's been a long time to wait.

Waiting is hard. But as they wait, all these people are looking. They are looking to do the right thing.

Look again at Mary and Joseph back in verses 22 to 24. When the time came for the purification rights required by the law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord.

[15 : 31] 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.

And I wonder if you notice where the emphasis lies. The law is quite prominent, isn't it? And what's really striking is how Mary and Joseph are shown to remain faithful to the keeping of the law again and again.

They do the purification rights as required. They take Jesus to be consecrated to God as required. They sacrifice as required.

And as they do so, they're actually remembering again that God redeems. The act of presenting the firstborn son to God, as all faithful Israelites had to do, is to remind them of the time of Exodus.

when God freed them from slavery and spared their firstborn sons during the very first Passover. And so, it's actually a requirement designed to cause God's people to look at their God once again and marvel at his act of redemption.

[16 : 56] They're looking and remembering God, their Redeemer, and trusting him to remain true to his character. Simeon, too, remains a faithful person.

We're told so little about him apart from the fact that he's waiting. But verse 25 does tell us he is righteous and devout. In other words, he loves God.

He is devout in believing in him and fearing him. He's trusting him and his words. Otherwise, he wouldn't be looking for the consolation of Israel.

And he was a man who loved others. The exact opposite of what God's people during Isaiah's time were doing. For Simeon is described as righteous and righteous people love justice and treat others fairly.

And so he gets it. He is remaining faithful to the essence of the law, which Jesus would later summarize as love God, love your neighbor.

[18 : 13] But as someone looking for the consolation of Israel, he's certainly not claiming sinlessness. He knows he needs redemption.

God's love your love your love. And it's the same with Anna. Well, we've already read about her actions in the temple, worshipping, fasting, and praying.

So we won't dwell on her example. And all of them are indeed models to us in their waiting. They didn't grumble.

They didn't turn away. Now, I'm sure they lamented. I'm sure they felt tempted to slack off or give up. Others in Simeon's position would have.

There was a group of Jews during that time, for instance, called the Zealots, who had decided that armed rebellion was the way. They had given up on God's ways, on God's promise that he would bring about the redemption of Jerusalem and decided to take things into their own hands.

[19 : 23] They decided they knew better. And it's certainly tempting, in our own waiting, to give up on God's word and God's ways.

We wait, perhaps, for a friend who hurt us to say sorry to us. And until then, we fail to be kind to them, despite God's call to us to do differently.

Because giving them the cold shoulder is so much easier and feels so much better, at least in the short run. We wait, perhaps, for life to stop disappointing us.

But instead of keeping our hearts open and pursuing the call of God to love others, as God asks us to, we retreat into a self-righteous kind of suffering, seeing ourselves constantly as only the victim.

No one cares, no one understands, so I'll stop caring for others. We wait, perhaps, to beat some addiction, some besetting sin, but we decide God's way of confession and repentance, acceptance of hearing his word of grace in the scriptures and responding to his grace in prayer daily.

[20 : 51] It's just too much work. We find waiting in the way he asks us to, too much to bear. But God invites us now to trust him, trust his ways, because the next thing we see in this passage is the impeccable sense of God's timing.

For at some point, when we're not told exactly how, Simeon receives a revelation from the Holy Spirit, verse 26. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah.

And moved by the Spirit, he shows up in the temple courts. And of course, at just the right time, Mary and Joseph show up, too. They are there to follow God's word in God's ways.

And God's timing, as always, is perfect. The two parties meet as God intended. I don't know if Simeon was asked to look for a baby specifically.

Luke simply tells us that the Holy Spirit told him that he would see the Lord's Messiah. If he was, I'm sure one of the thoughts in his mind would be, are you joking, Lord?

[22 : 13] I thought the Messiah was going to be this great mighty king. We've all said that to the Lord at some point in our lives, haven't we? Are you joking? Are you joking?

But he continues to trust God's timing is right. So upon seeing the parents, verse 28, Simeon took Jesus in his arms and praised God, saying, Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace, for my eyes have seen your salvation.

You see, as Simeon takes this baby and says that he has seen God's salvation, he doesn't mean, of course, that he's seen God's salvation accomplish at that very moment.

the babies will have to grow up first and then carry out God's mission. Jesus still has to go to die on the cross. So in that sense, there's more waiting to do.

But God's plans are so perfect, his timing never off, that Simeon can declare that he has indeed seen salvation, for he has seen the sovereign saviour.

[23 : 33] he has waited and waited, and he waits no longer. Remember earlier that feeling when the CEO announces that there might be retrenchment, or when your doctor says you need to take more tests, or when your wife or husband storm out of the door?

Now, just imagine how you would feel when the CEO announces that your department isn't affected, or the doctor tells you that the test says that you're in the clear, or if your wife or husband comes back and says, I'm sorry, I love you.

But that's how Simeon feels. There's a sense of happiness, of liberation, of a wig being lifted off your back. Consolation is coming.

It has arrived. comfort, comfort my people, the Lord says, for your sin has been paid for. And you see, it has arrived in Jesus.

That's the gist of Simeon's song. And Jesus is worth waiting for. And he's worth waiting for because of two things. Firstly, he's the culmination of the ages.

[24 : 57] Isaiah's word has come true. And God's personal word to Simeon, that he won't die before seeing the Messiah, has come true. At exactly the right time, God arrives.

Just turn with me for a moment to Galatians chapter 4, verse 4 to 5. And this is what verse 4 says. But when the sad time had fully come, when the moment arrives, God sent his son, born of a woman, born under the law.

And that's exactly what we see here, isn't it? You see, as Mary and Joseph consecrate and dedicate Jesus at the temple, what's happening is that Jesus is really identifying with his covenant people.

he's born under the law. He's saying, I'm one of you. And I've become one of you so that I can save you.

I can rescue you. For see what else Galatians says in verse 5. He came to redeem those under the law that we might receive adoption to sonship.

[26 : 20] You see, like Jesus, we are born under the law. But unlike Jesus, we stand condemned under the law because we have no hope of keeping it all. But Jesus, the divine son, came as the human son, fulfilled all the requirements of the law, and then he took the curse of the law, taking our condemnation in our place, all to save us.

It's fitting that Simeon saw Jesus in the temple courts, in the place of the law, because Jesus will free us from the condemnation of the law.

Jesus becomes that new temple. Secondly, he's a light to the nations. Look at verses 31 to 32.

For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.

Now, if you're not too familiar with the Old Testament, you might understandably think that all this talk about waiting and hoping is actually quite narrow and nationalistic. It seems to be all about Israel, and what has Israel got to do with me?

[27 : 43] But that wouldn't be right. For Simeon shows, even from the Old Testament, that Jesus affects Gentiles, non-Jews, as well.

Simeon, in calling Jesus the light to the Gentiles, is actually quoting the prophet Isaiah again, 42 verse 6 and 49 verse 6, for those of you taking notes. This comfort, you see, comes to Israel, but it's not just for Israel, but extends beyond Israel.

Jesus is Jewish, but he hasn't just come for the Jews. That has never been the case. For it was never the case that sin was merely a Jewish problem.

That's what Genesis tells us clearly. Injustice and prejudice, envy and jealousy, unforgiveness and a lack of love has never been confined to one particular race.

And it was always the case that the Saviour would come for the benefit of the entire world. He would open their eyes. As the great Anglican bishop of the 19th century, J.C.

[29 : 02] Rao, in his comments on this verse, says, Without Jesus, we non-Jews were sunk in gross darkness and superstition.

We knew not the way of life. We worshipped the works of our own hands. Our wisest philosophers were utterly ignorant in spiritual things. But the gospel of Christ was like sunrise to Greece and Rome and the whole world.

The light which it let in on man's minds on the subject of religion was as great as the change from night to day. And that brings great contentment to Simeon.

When he sees the real Jesus, not the Jesus as he wants him to be, but the real Jesus, he finds contentment. His life is complete.

He knows that Jesus, the culmination of the ages, the light to the nations, and that's enough. And he's ready to go. In fact, he has no fear of death.

[30 : 14] And that's what all who know Jesus possess. We've seen salvation, we are at peace with God, and so death is to us like sleeping.

God is to God. But Simeon hasn't quite finished. We might wish he had, but there's more to the song still. There will be rising and falling, verse 33.

The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to marry his mother, the 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 also.

This isn't an easy verse to understand, but Simeon seems to be suggesting to Mary that while Jesus will be the cause of many in Israel rising, he will also be the cause of others falling.

He seems to be remembering the words of Isaiah again in chapter 8 verses 14 to 15. I'll just read verse 14. He will be a holy place for both Israel and Judah.

[31 : 34] He will be a stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall. And indeed in Jesus' ministry, we know of those who will rise in opposition to his teaching.

indeed it is the rejection of the Messiah that will pave the way for salvation. But their rejection will be their downfall.

And none of that would have been easy for Jesus' mother to hear. It would be like a sword piercing her soul. For as anyone who calls Jesus their saviour will find out very quickly, one of the things that this saviour does is to shine his light upon our hearts.

He exposes us. He actually dares to critique us how we use our time, spend our money, chase our ambitions, and he dares to ask us that we get in line with him rather than oppose him.

Now some people of his day didn't like it. that's why they wanted to kill him, to silence him. But that's not going to work. After all this, Jesus defeats even death.

[32 : 57] As he defeats death, yes, he saves us, but at the very same time, he's also claiming his right to be the Lord of our lives.

He can't silence him, no matter how we try. And so Jesus asks us to be on the right side, the one that calls him saviour and Lord.

That's the side that doesn't fall. And we have every reason to choose that side. Because after all, here's what today's passage tells us.

God is good. His timing is always right. He knows we wait. And he knows we are tempted to stray during that time.

But he asks us to wait for him. Indeed, sometimes the waiting itself is how God exposes our hearts and reveals our faithlessness to us.

[34 : 01] He shows us our wrong motives of wanting our own glory, our own independence. And so he actually uses that waiting to show how much we need him to build dependency and intimacy with him.

God is still with us even in the waiting. He's doing something in us through the waiting. And he's working on us, crafting us slowly but surely to become that masterpiece, pure and blameless, that he wants us to be.

And he's reminding us that yes, waiting is hard, but the one we wait for is worth it. So stay godly.

Stay on the right side. He is the God of mercy. He brings consolation. He brings redemption. The law demands, but he's fulfilled it in Jesus.

The darkness beckons, but he's come as a light to the nations. And so like Simeon, we can wait. Like Anna, we can speak of him to all who will listen.

[35 : 17] And the one we wait for will one day come again, this time as the king of glory. But until then, he's patiently refining us, ensuring that every single day, whatever circumstances you're in, that you are living by faith and running in repentance to him and growing in the grace of our Lord Jesus.

And one day, you will no longer be stuck at Gatwick Airport. You will have arrived at your destination. No more disruption, no more confusion, frustration, no more resignation.

So, brothers and sisters, as you wait, walk with him. He's worth waiting for. He's going to take you to a place of ultimate consolation and joy and gladness.

He won't let you down. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we're conscious that we live in between the ages, in the time between your first coming and your second coming.

And Father, as we wait for that day, sometimes we wait with groaning. Some of us are groaning even right now. We wait with frustration.

[36 : 54] some of us are perhaps uncertain about what our future holds. But Father, help us to remember, no matter what, we can trust in you.

We know your timing is always perfect. And we know that you have brought us ultimate joy in Christ, the joy of knowing you, the one who reigns over all the heavens and the earth, who holds our future in his hands.

So help us to live godly lives as we wait for you. Help us to cultivate the fruit of the spirit and help us to keep encouraging each other to look forward to that day when Christ is ours forevermore.

In Jesus' name we pray.