

The Consolation of Israel

Luke 2:22-32 (ESV)

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto from God the Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us pray:

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable to you, O Lord, our Rock and Redeemer. Amen.

Not many of us are allowed to know our death date. Really, none of us do; except those given special revelation by the Lord. The Lord rarely makes this known. He wants us to keep attentive and alert, not becoming distracted by questions concerning our end. Yet, one man who did hear of his end was Moses. God had told him that he would die before the Israelites entered into the promised land. So, when they were just on the other side of the Jordan, Moses had to know his death was imminent. King Hezekiah was told by the Lord through the prophet Isaiah that he would die from his sickness. After a special petition by the king, the Lord added 15 years to his life, which must have been a tense final countdown. Finally, of special interest to us from Luke chapter 2, is Simeon, who knew something special about the end of his life. He knew that he would not die before he was allowed to behold the Lord's Christ. This man was righteous and devout. He was awaiting the consolation of Israel, the fulfillment of God's promises. So, the Lord promised him the blessing of seeing this consolation with his very own eyes. Oh, what a glorious blessing to finish one's course of life after that mountain-top experience! With what a magnificent reward our Lord blessed this man Simeon! Yet, dear Christian, Simeon is not alone in this blessing. Simeon knew he could die because he had witnessed everything the Lord had promised to give. You have received that very same gift. Dear Christian,

YOU HAVE RECEIVED THE CONSOLATION OF ISRAEL.

What exactly did Simeon receive? He received into his arms the newborn Jesus. Today really marks the end of the "Christmas" season. It might seem a little weird that we are still talking about little baby Jesus. For many, Christmas was over on December 26th. Yet, we, according to what God has given us in his Word, continue to mark all the milestones and events in Jesus' life. One of the last ones we hear concerning Jesus' infancy is his first entrance into the temple. It says, "**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 (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, 'Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord') and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, 'a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons'**". What does this story concern and why is it

important for you? There's a lot of history there and meticulous details of God's commandments to the Israelites as revealed in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy. What is important to note is our Lord Jesus submitted himself completely, freely and willingly, to laws and prescriptions which had no requirement on him, all for your sake. There are two laws which God gave the Israelites which Jesus took in your stead: the law of purification and the law of the firstborn male.

The law of purification was God's rules concerning when mothers and their children could be reinstated to ritual purity, when they could re-enter into the worship life of God's people. For male children, 40 days after the birth, the mother was to bring an offering to the Lord's altar for the priest to make atonement for her, either a lamb and a pigeon, or two pigeons, if the couple was poor. These animals were to be for a burnt offering and a sin offering, for an acceptance into God's favor and a clear expression that sin was being remitted. These sacrifices testify that from the very moment of one's conception and birth, sin needs to be dealt with; it could not be ignored.

The law of the firstborn was God's reminder of great salvation. Remember, God had struck down all the firstborn of Egypt as judgment concerning Israel's continued slavery. For saving the Israelite firstborn from this disaster, the Lord told his people that all the firstborn belonged to him. He would use them as he sees fit because they were the sign and reminder for the people of Israel that without this Lord God, they would still be in slavery. So, the Lord required all of Israel to redeem, to buy back, their firstborn from the Lord by paying a small tax at the temple.

As we behold Mary and Joseph carrying the Christ child into the temple, it might make you question, "Wait, here they are bringing the Lord of life. Why jump through all these hoops? Does God really have to make a sacrifice for himself? Does God need to make atonement for himself?" The answer is of course, "No." The Lord Jesus has no need to make purification for himself and Mary. There was no sin in his conception nor his birth. He was conceived not by man, but by the Holy Spirit. He was born without any sin, Mary remaining a virgin. He himself is the sacrifice for the sin of all mankind! His blood shed on the cross will be of more worth than those two little pigeons. He also has no need to pay the firstborn due. Here in Mary's arms is the first and only-begotten Son of the Father. He was the one who delivered all the Israelite firstborn sons! He is more than the sign that God saves; he is the very God who saves. Dear Christian, here is the Lord Jesus fulfilling all things in your place. Purification is now yours. Redemption is now yours. That is why we return one last time to the story of Christ's infancy. The Lord enters his temple for the first time, ready to return with a sacrifice that will pay for all sins, once and for all.

Simeon testifies the significance of this little baby when he gets his chance to hold the Lord God. He testifies what this little baby is worth. He does not testify for himself only, but he testifies for you. He says, "**Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your**

salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.” I can’t even imagine the reaction of Mary and Joseph when this old man unexpectedly asked them to hold Jesus and then said these spectacular things concerning the little baby. I know I would be concerned enough for this stranger to hold my newborn. But, what might have made them marvel the most is these two words Simeon uses to describe his experience of receiving Jesus: glory and peace.

He says that Jesus is your glory, the glory of Israel. He is your honor and your dignity. This baby Jesus is what defines your worth. Jesus is what defines your value. Normally what defines your value or worth are things such as income tax brackets, neighborhood market value, or maybe job status. If you’re a little more sentimental, and less focused on money (which you should be), you might say relationships define your value or worth: your parents or your siblings or your children. Simeon testifies that in fact it is your God who gives you honor and dignity. It is your God who wishes to be within arm lengths, to be cradled in your arms. Here is the Creator of all things, whose word upholds creation by his power, wishing to be with you. Here is your rock and refuge, who has purchased and won you from all sins, death, and from the power of the devil, wishing to rest in your arms. He has defined you with immeasurable worth because he wished to take on flesh, to take your place, and to take you to himself.

He says that Jesus is your peace. Jesus leaves you without fear. He brings you contentment. He provides you tranquility and serenity both in relation to God and in relation to the world. Jesus held within Simeon’s arms testifies you are not God’s enemy anymore. The warfare between you and God is done. Because our Lord Jesus came down from heaven to be your substitute, because he wished to be the sacrifice for your disobedience, there is an eternal peace treaty between you and your God. There can be no doubt anymore that God is on your side. At the same time, knowing that God is not your enemy means every other agitation and disruption loses its troubling power. As St. Paul says, **“If God is for us, who can be against us?”** As long as he is on your side, nothing else should trouble or concern you because no one can take away the peace which Jesus gives you.

Simeon’s security and contentment concerning his death, his words, **“now you are letting your servant depart in peace”**, was not just because he knew the date of his death, but it was because of the promises he had received concerning his own death. It was not enough that he knew that he should die soon, but that he should know that he would die having the chance to hold Jesus. All the things we observe concerning Simeon and his calmness over his own death are things accessible and promised to you. Simeon knew the promises because the Holy Spirit was upon him and had revealed everything to Simeon. You too have the testimony of the Holy Spirit. He richly and daily blesses you with the knowledge that Jesus loves you. You might not have gotten the chance to hold the precious Christ child in your arms. Yet, he was the one who washed with the holy water of Baptism. You might not have gotten to hear his preaching and his teaching

throughout the land of Judea. Yet, he is the one whose word is accessible any time of day in the Holy Scriptures. You might not have sat at the foot of the cross on Good Friday. Yet, you frequently receive the very body and blood of Christ which was given and shed for you. All these testimonies of the Holy Spirit confer and seal for you that you too have the consolation of Israel. You too can die in peace. Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.