**The Consolation of Israel**

Based on [Luke 2:22-32](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Lk2.22-32)

Preached on December 29, 2019

The First Sunday after Christmas

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Simeon and Anna are two saints, mentioned in the Scriptures as examples of God’s people who are righteous by faith. We are saved by Grace through faith. Faith is what believes and truly treasures the revelation of God. And the faith of Simeon is that he was waiting patiently and with expectation of the Messiah to come to them in their lifetime.

This faith is a wonderful, powerful thing. It gives the confidence and assurance in things not seen. Think of Simeon, his whole life was spent waiting to see the Christ. And he is happy in seeing him.

Simeon’s joy in seeing the Christ child is worth considering. What is his joy? It’s not as though Simeon is any better off. His situation didn’t change really. He didn’t become more healthy, or wealthy or wise as a result. **It’s only that, because he met the messiah, he is prepared to leave the world in death.** On the one hand, this is simply the fulfillment of a prophecy...Simeon was told he wouldn’t die until he saw the Christ. But on the other hand, it is spiritually true that this christ is the one in whom we have the confidence to leave this world in death.

Somebody once said that the purpose of the church is to prepare people to die. Sounds morbid, and those who wish to avoid the topic of death probably wouldn’t feel comfortable here. Some people refuse to let their children attend funerals, even of close relatives, because they believe the topic of death is to serious for them. I have heard that at some senior homes, those who depart there are kept hidden from the other residence, until the halls are cleared out, before they will walk the deceased out of the building. Avoidance is not a mature way to approach life’s problems, and death is arguably the biggest threat that everyone undeniably must face.

In medicine, vaccines are given to expose you to small manageable doses of the virus so that your body can develop a way to deal with greater exposure to it later. In counselling and therapy, therapists attempt to get you to speak about your problems in a safe environment, so that...rather than having to avoid certain fears you daily face, you build up a tolerance and a way to face them with maturity. It is the same thing that Christ does with death. We all will have to face it someday, best to cultivate the attitude and understanding of how to deal with it now, before it comes to stare you in the face.

In this sense we profitably use the example of Simeon today. Simeon was not waiting for the Christ to come and make his life situation easier. He was waiting to see the Christ so that he could confidently prepare to die. We do the same at the conclusion of the Lord’s Supper. We sing the Song of Simeon, the Nunc Dimmittis where we say what he said, “Lord, now you let your servant depart in peace. Your word has been fulfilled.”

For Simeon, the Holy Spririt revealed a word to him that had yet to be fulfilled with him. Now that word is fulfilled and his watch is over. Likewise, it is important for you to consider this: is there something that you are waiting to be fulfilled, before you may depart in peace? I’ll tell you that in my case, according to my natural thoughts, I feel like there is something I need to see before I die. In my mind, I feel that I need to see all my children reach adulthood...preferably responsible adulthood. I feel that if I die today, I will not have as of yet been able to fulfill my fatherly duties.

Maybe you also have some aspirations for your parenting, your marriage, your retirement that you feel need to happen before you can comfortably say goodbye to this world of sin and death. But know this, you are not promised a tomorrow in this world. God has made no disclosures to you that you will need to fulfill any prophecies before you can die well. Even if the good Lord takes you before you can see your children raised to adulthood, you can trust that he knows what he’s doing. If he takes you before you get to enjoy your retirement savings in peace and quietness with your spouse, know that the retirement to glory is better. The real question then is this: is there anything God expects of you before you die, or before he returns? The answer is only this, repent and be baptized.

The first part is where faith really comes in. Do you have any sins that you are hiding from God? Even though we know you can’t hide things from him...that didn’t stop Adam and Eve from trying it in the garden. Do you have any sins that torment you so you avoid facing them. **In order to prepare to die well, you need to confess your sins to God with an open heart, that Christ, the scapegoat for our sins who bore them on the tree, can credit you with his righteousness.**  You may confess to a pastor if your conscience would be so assured that his forgiveness is Christs’. You can confess to one another for mutual consolation. But you always should confess your sins to God...not just that you are a sinner, but any sins that have tormented your conscience. You cannot enter eternal life with a dirty conscience, but as Peter says,

***“Baptism, which corresponds to [Noah’s flood], now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.”***

You must receive Christ to enter the Kingdom of God by faith. That is what Baptism is for, to give your senses assurance that you have received him, because He promises himself in Baptism, and he doesn’t lie. You must also eat the flesh of the son of man and drink his blood to have eternal life. This is a spiritual eating by faith, but the spiritual eating is carried out in and assured by sacramental eating and drinking of the bread and wine which are Christ’s True Body and Blood, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of all of your sins. Do it often in remembrance of Christ.

Yes there are people who haven’t received sacramental baptism, or sacramental communion who, by repentance and faith believe in the gift of God through Jesus Christ. **But the sacramental gifts are for you to use the gospel to your benefit through the ministry of the church.** I daresay Simeon and Anna are among such saints, because faith, first and foremost receives the promise, and the promise is for you and for your children, for all who fear God and want to do what’s right, the promise is for everyone to believe and receive the salvation prepared once for all on the cross of Jesus, the Christ who, after forgiving your sins bids you depart in peace.