

December 27, 2015

*St. Luke 2:22-35: **“Wait for the Lord!”***

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“Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.” (Luke 2:25)

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We are told in our text that Simeon was a “righteous and devout” man. What that means is that he believed in the Savior even though the Savior had yet to be identified as Jesus of Nazareth. In the temple, Simeon had been waiting and waiting for God to make good on his promise. We are told in Luke 2:26 that “it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ.” He had been waiting for God to bring into this world the Prince of Peace.

Waiting. That is something that most people are not very good at. Typically, we hate waiting in lines, waiting at the doctor's office, waiting all day for installers or repairmen to show up, waiting to find out how things are going to turn out, waiting to open Christmas presents, waiting for things to get better, waiting and waiting and waiting. Most of us tend to be very impatient. We hate wasting a lot of time when we think we could be taking care of so many other things.

But, when the waiting is over, we find a certain sense of relief. In the moment when we finally reach the front of the line, when we hear the knock on the door, when we get to the end of the matter, when we open up the presents, and when things begin to get better, there is a certain sense of relief and rejoicing that wells up inside. For Simeon, it was a much larger issue. His focus is on what is really most important of all - the coming of the Savior - the Prince of Peace. In the New Testament, our waiting should revolve around the Savior's coming. The writer of Ecclesiastes says, “Better is the end of a thing than its beginning, and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit (Ecclesiastes 7:8).” Our waiting is to be in humility with a sober anticipation of what is coming.

We are told that Simeon had to wait no longer. He would have that sigh of relief. Mary and Joseph bring the baby Jesus into the temple and it is revealed to him that this is the one. He is at the end of the waiting. Simeon took little Jesus into his arms and broke into a song of praise to God that tells us everything that we need to know: “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 (Luke 2:29-32).”

Indeed, the wait was over. Now he could leave this world truly satisfied. The Bible does not tell us when Simeon dies, and perhaps he had to even wait a little while for that. Still, the point is that he would die in peace when the moment would arrive. He would live and die knowing and believing that all of his sins would be paid for in full by this child who is both God and man. Still, it is interesting to read that this peace would not come easy. Just like waiting, the way in which peace comes is with a lot of strife. It says: “And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, ‘Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed (Luke 2:33-35).’”

What Simeon is talking about in this prophecy is the truth about peace. It means that there is a war going on. Peace is that for which someone longs and appreciates when it arrives and lasts. Luther makes some observations that are very helpful in this regard. We should not despair when we see so many opposed to the way of peace that Christ offers and gives; and there are plenty who are opposed to Jesus. Not everyone is willing to give up their evil desires. In fact, some love their wickedness to the end and will never give up fighting until the peace of Christ is done away with. Remember the words of Jesus? "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid (John 14:27)." Yes! Jesus has overcome the world.

It's as if Simeon is saying to Mary and all of us, "A son has been born, the Savior! The unbelieving world, the sinful flesh, and the devil who would make you despair of God, will be against him. They will fight against him to the end. This unbelieving world will have nothing to do with the peace he brings, for it will require them to die to themselves and live for God and one another instead of living for their sinful flesh!" And isn't that the truth? Whenever people are confronted with the person and work of Jesus, are not their hearts revealed, and does it not cause the rising and falling of many? Do we not see Herod killing the babies in Bethlehem? Do we not see many who repent? Luther writes:

If all this had not been so clearly predicted throughout the prophets, no Christian could endure. Who can bear to see the Gospel so condemned, not to speak of the spite which rages among us? Why are men persecuted and killed for the sake of the Gospel? What has the little Child done? He announces: "My Father will be gracious to you and will free you from death, sin, and hell." And then men tread him underfoot and hang him on a cross as one accursed. Who can bear this? If I went by common sense, I would not be so patient as our Lord God when he offers men mercy and they curse him and pray to the devil.

Waiting for the true peace that passes all understanding is not an easy thing whether you are on the Old Testament side of things waiting for the Savior to come, or the New Testament side of things knowing all that Jesus has done. Either way is a waiting to get there. To a certain extent, Simeon was on both sides of the Old and New Testament and saw waiting. We also struggle with this fact as we know that Jesus has the victory and yet it seems that sin, death, and the devil are winning. It is difficult for us to believe in the peace of Christ, to have that peace of Christ in the forgiveness of sins, and still have to live in this wicked life while simply looking forward to the consummation of the peace that will bring a complete end to the war and suffering that surrounds us.

We can sure understand why it is hard to be waiting. But, in the midst of that waiting, we wait in the same way that David was waiting in Psalm 27. There he writes: "I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living! Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD (Psalm 27:13-14)!" In other words, we can wait and be strong for we know that when it is all said and done, we will look upon the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. What that means is this: we will have the Lord himself and all that is perfect and loving. And, living in the land of the living will be so great that it will rub out of our minds any thought or emotion connected to the land of the dying and the dead. When we understand that, we can truly be patient. We can be strong. Now, I'm

not saying that it is easy, but when you have the peace of Christ, and when you know that you have the victory through him, it makes everything down here insignificant.

The apostle Paul writes, and we would do well to take it to heart, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us (Romans 8:18)." Waiting is not all that bad when you think of that way. The problem is that we often tend to forget. That's why we constantly are required to look at the baby Jesus through the eyes of Simeon and through the eyes of all the witnesses of Scripture so that we do not forget what is most important of all. We want to depart in peace, and we will, because we have the peace that passes all understanding.

Therefore, like Simeon, we need to hold the baby and look intently at him. There is nothing more important than the baby and all that he has done. Consider it! Simeon is holding the baby and thinking about his departure. That is the bottom line for all of us. No matter what we are waiting for in this life, it all ends up in leaving this life behind. And, this baby Jesus brings a glorious departure where we leave it all behind for the kingdom that lasts forever. The baby is the beginning, the birth of us all! It only makes sense if you understand what Simeon understood. The ultimate goal is to be with the Lord and to have the Lord forever.

Are you ready to depart in peace? That really is the question of the text. Are you ready to depart in peace even when it seems that sin, death, and the devil still have a fighting chance even though they don't? We believe, teach, and confess that we will look on the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living and that we are more than conquerors through him who won the victory for us! And for that, we can be patient. We can be strong. We can Wait For the Lord!

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott