

A Light to the Gentiles: Simeon's witness.

Luke 2:22-40

I will make you a light for the Gentiles that you may be my salvation – my Y'shua – to the ends of the earth. (Isa 49:6)

Hands up, those men who are the first-born sons of their mothers!

If you had been born Jews at the time of Jesus, ***do you know why your parents*** would have taken you to the Temple and ***offered a sacrifice for you?***

By your birth as a first-born boy, you belonged to God, your life was owed to him, and only the death of a substitute could take your place. ***It all went back to the Passover at the time of Moses***, when God's People, Israel, were set free from slavery in Egypt.

Let me speak to you, as if you lived at that time:

God intended to free you, but Pharaoh would not let you go, even after God had sent 9 plagues to punish the Egyptians. God said to Pharaoh, "Israel is MY first-born son, so I will kill YOUR first-born son, then you ***will*** set my people free." And God passed this judgement on everyone in Egypt, from Pharaoh's first-born son to that of a slave-woman. It was a terrible but limited picture of what will one day happen to all mankind, for we are all sinners, rebellious and disobedient to our Creator.

But God provided a way for His People to escape his judgement – they were to kill a lamb for every household, paint its blood on the door-frame of the house, and stay inside while God's Destroying Angel ***PASSed OVER***. ***He would look on the blood*** and not kill their first-born sons. Inside the house they were to eat the lamb roasted, clothed ready to leave Egypt forever, trusting in God's loving provision.

Ever afterwards, Israel was to commemorate the Passover annually – and to recognise that their first-born sons belonged specially to their SAVIOUR-GOD. Joseph & Mary took Jesus, because Jesus was going to identify himself with sinful humanity in every respect, even though he was without any sin himself.

Of course, ***this story applies to every one of us***, for Jesus, God's SON, died in our place at Passover, instead of us, to set us free from sin and guilt – if we will commit our lives in trust, to him.

Who was Simeon? What sort of man was he?

A man in Jerusalem – just an ordinary man, a layman, otherwise unknown. He is described as **righteous and devout**. In other words, he behaved righteously, honestly and fairly towards other people – he lived an upright life – **and** he was a man of faith and prayer, service and devotion towards God. These two aspects – **godliness and right behaviour** – **must** go together in **our** lives: the way **we** treat our fellow men and women demonstrates whether our belief in God is genuine! *We are here this morning to worship God – but how do we behave during the rest of the week?!*

But, more than this, Simeon is a man *waiting for the consolation of Israel* – **eagerly looking forward**, would be better – **to the Coming of the Messiah**. It had been over 700 years since the prophets of Israel had begun speaking of **God's promise** of a truly righteous king, who would rule his people from David's throne **forever**, bringing true peace, true freedom from their enemies – one who would **really** display God's character and glory.

Israel had been restored from captivity and exile 500 years ago, **but they no longer had a king in David's line**, they were not free from foreign oppression – **all that the prophets had prophesied had not yet come to pass** – and the mass of the people had little real hope in God's intervention. Some were all for violent revolt, to bring about God's promises by their own strength. But there were some **who truly trusted God to fulfil his own promises**; one such was Simeon. *Is it so different today? Simeon was trusting God for Jesus's **first** coming. Are we looking forward to his **second** coming – as God's promise, and answer to the present state of the world under God's judgement?*

The fourth thing said about Simeon is that **the Holy Spirit was on him**. He is peculiarly approved by God. Moreover, the Holy Spirit has revealed to Simeon that he will not die before seeing God's Messiah. And he is guided and moved by the Spirit to enter the Temple *just* at the time Mary & Joseph come with the 6-week

old Jesus to dedicate him to the Lord – as *the first-born of Mary his life is forfeit to the Lord unless redeemed*. (Exod 13:2,13)

This MAN OF PRAYER is truly an example to us all. Would God testify about us: 'You are upright in your dealings with others; you are godfearing and devout, putting Me first in your life; someone of prayer and faith, looking forward to the Coming of Christ?' *Let's ask for His mercy and forgiveness!*

What happens when Simeon meets the family?

What happens when Simeon meets Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus? We are told Simeon takes the infant in his arms and praises God. But surely some conversation took place first? If the Spirit directed Simeon to *this* couple and *this* baby, I suspect nevertheless, his direction was confirmed by some quite ordinary words:

"What is the baby's name?" "Jesus" – or as they would have said, "Y'shua". **Y'shua – THE LORD IS SALVATION or THE LORD IS SAVIOUR** – the name means both. To a man like Simeon, steeped in God's word, that name would be full of God's promise. The great word **SALVATION** is frequent in the prophecy of Isaiah – whose own name, Isaiah or **Yeshayahu**, is simply Jesus' name the other way round: **SALVATION IS OF THE LORD**.

Simeon would recall such verses as:

I will make you a light for the Gentiles that you may be my Y'shua – my salvation – to the ends of the earth. (Isa 49:6)

and

All the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God. (Isa 52:10)

Is it any surprise that, under the power of the Spirit, Simeon becomes a **MAN OF PRAISE?!**

Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace.....

Sovereign Lord – a striking word: it means **absolute master** –

just as **servant** can mean **slave**. Simeon sees himself as having been posted by his Master as a watchman, to observe and report the Coming of God's Anointed King. And as a watchman or sentry might see the first light of the rising sun – and know with the coming of dawn his task is done – so Simeon knows his Master is releasing him **in peace**, his life fulfilled, God's purpose for him accomplished.

When the hour for our departure comes, will he find us still on duty, men and women of prayer and praise, ready to tell others about Jesus? For each of us has been set as a watchman to warn others that God holds us to account for our lives, but in his love has also provided a Saviour, who alone can save us!

Simeon said: For my eyes have seen your salvation – your Y'shua! What trust, what confidence, as he identifies **this** baby with God's promise!

Surely we have greater grounds for trusting in God's salvation – in his Y'shua! But have we really trusted? – committed ourselves – been prepared to be taken as a fool – as perhaps some passers-by regarded Simeon –

For Simeon doesn't just praise God that *this* baby is God's Chosen and Anointed King – he goes on to say that **God is doing this for all people** – in the sight of **everyone**. His words are mind-blowing! On the strength of all he knows of God's promises (two of which I have quoted), Simeon goes on to praise God that this salvation will bring **light to the Gentiles**, and **glory to God's people**. This is *far* in advance of Simeon's contemporaries, such is his deep love and trust in God's word. No wonder Mary & Joseph marvel!

Simeon goes further...

But Simeon doesn't stop there. He becomes a **MAN OF PROPHECY**. He asks God to bless these parents and then he speaks in particular to Mary, and tells her something of Jesus' future. *Why did he do this?* No doubt to prepare her for Jesus'

future opposition, rejection, humiliation and death. Could it be that Simeon had realised that the One described by Isaiah in the words *Unto us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders... he will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom....(Isa 9:6-7)*

was also to be
the man of sorrows, familiar with suffering...despised and esteemed not...who would be ...pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities...for the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all...? (Isa 53:3-6)

We cannot say – but **we, ourselves**, in hindsight, ought to appreciate Simeon spoke from God words of truth – that, when the time came, must have sustained Mary through her darkest hour.

May we remember that God's wisdom is far, far above ours. When suffering comes, let's not let go his promises for us, but trust him, whose way is perfect.

Just as important – do **we** realise that Jesus is a *stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall (Isa 8:14)* – or else a *precious cornerstone and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame (Isa 28:16)?*

You can't be neutral about Jesus. Either: he means everything to you – he is your Lord & Saviour – or: in some way, you despise, ignore and reject him. ***Our thoughts reveal our attitude to him*** – and these are **witnesses** to the judgement God will pass on us!

We are not saved by our own merits or efforts – we are saved or lost by our relationship to HIM, the salvation GOD has prepared for us.

May the words and faith of Simeon, **MAN OF PRAYER, PRAISE AND PROPHECY**, direct **our** steps to Jesus, our Saviour, so that we too may depart in peace.

Amen.