

## Nunc Dimittis

21 And when eight days were completed for the circumcision of the Child, His name was called JESUS, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb.

22 Now when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him to Jerusalem to present *Him* to the Lord 23 (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every male who opens the womb shall be called holy to the LORD "), 24 and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, "A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."

25 And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. 26 And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

27 So he came by the Spirit into the temple. And when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the law, 28 he took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said:

29 "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, According to Your word;

30 For my eyes have seen Your salvation 31 Which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, 32 A light to *bring* revelation to the Gentiles, And the glory of Your people Israel."

33 And Joseph and His mother marveled at those things which were spoken of Him. 34 Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this *Child* is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against 35 "(yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." (Lk. 2:21-35)

Simeon was well-known in Jerusalem. Wherever he had grown up, lived and worked in his long life, he wanted his life to conclude at the centre of the worship of God: Jerusalem. So he'd made his home there, and was known by these three adjectives: just, devout and hoping. He was just, that is, he was in right standing with God and man, he had trusted in God's provisions for sin and righteousness and obeyed them. He was devout, not someone who put his religion on for show like the Pharisees, but one who truly believed and felt and practised the things of God. He had reverence for God, and felt the things of God as a weighty things. And then he had a deep longing to see the promises of God, particularly those of Messiah come to pass. Prophecy and promise was no incidental thing to him. It lay at the heart of his faith: a promise-keeping God, a faithful God, a God who acts in history.

With this triad of piety: just, devout and patiently hoping, he had probably earned a quiet reputation for himself in Jerusalem. After all, the religion of Israel had sunk to perhaps its lowest level at that time, and truly godly, pious people were in short supply. You had the rich and wealthy Sadducees controlling the Temple, but believing very little of Scripture, you had the proud and hypocritical Pharisees controlling the synagogues, but adding to the Scriptures. When you found someone who loved God in simplicity and truth, you had found a diamond in the rough.

In the time before Pentecost, the Holy Spirit still came upon people in different ways. Jesus said to His disciples that at that time in John 14:17: "the Spirit of truth... dwells with you and will be in you.

The Holy Spirit was with and upon Simeon in a special way. So much so that he had received special prophetic revelation from the Spirit: he would see the Messiah before death. Not a whim, not an optimistic idea, or some kind of vague mystical inkling combined with optimism. No, he knew, because verse 26 tells us that *it had been revealed to him*. Verse 29 says that "this was according to your Word". Simeon had received prophetic revelation that the Messiah would be born in his lifetime.

The same Spirit who had revealed that to him led him on a certain day to go to the Temple area.

One week after Jesus was born in Bethlehem, Mary and Joseph knew they needed to travel the 5 miles north to Jerusalem, to the Temple.

There were three ceremonies they had to, by Law, undergo after the birth of Jesus. The first was circumcision on the eighth day after the child's birth, when He would also be officially named. Every Hebrew boy undergoing this showed he was under God's covenant with Abraham, where God unconditionally promised to give to Abraham and his descendants land, seed, and blessing. This event probably took place where the family lived, and not at the Temple.

The second ceremony was that of redeeming the firstborn. Every firstborn son, who was not a Levite, needed to be redeemed at the price of five shekels at the Temple, at the earliest, 31 days after his birth.

A third ceremony under the Law of Moses was the purification of the mother after childbirth. This was to be 41 days after birth in the case of a boy, 81 in the case of a girl. Mary and Joseph were there to do both ceremonies. This meant she needed to present a sacrifice, a lamb if she could afford it, or two turtledoves, if she was poor. She would have gone into the Court of the Women, where there were thirteen trumpet-shaped chests for monetary contributions, called trumpets. Mary would have dropped the coins for the price of the sacrifices into the third trumpet.

The sound of the organ blasted, which announced that incense was about to be offered on the Golden Altar, and called all those to be purified. After this, the main ceremony was over, and the only ones remaining would be those who were there to offer special sacrifices, such as the dedication of the firstborn, and loved to linger in the Temple area, especially those devout widows and widowers who had made prayer and meditation their vocation.

The ceremony at the redemption of a firstborn son consisted of the formal presentation of the child to the priest, accompanied by two short 'benedictions,' the one for the law of redemption, the other for the gift of a firstborn son, after which the redemption money was paid.

It was at this moment that the Spirit-led Simeon, came across Joseph and Mary there to dedicate publicly the one-month old Yeshua. Simeon saw them, saw the Child, and his joy was complete.

All parents with infants in arms know that kind strangers look and smile, and occasionally even ask to hold the baby. But this was different. Simeon was gripped by prophetic revelation. This elderly man was not simply smiling at a baby. Simeon was seeing and asking to hold the Yes to all God's promises.

As he held the young Jesus, he spoke the words that have become the Nunc Dimittis, which is Latin for, Now You Are Dismissing. Now You Are Letting Me Depart.

Mary's song was about grace. Zacharias's song was about God's promises. The angels' song was about the great theme of life: glory to God and peace to man. Simeon's song is about salvation. What it does for the soul, what God did to prepare it, and what it means for all.

## **I. The Pleasure of Salvation**

29 "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, According to Your word; 30 For my eyes have seen Your salvation

When we're young, we want more years, and more time. When old, and worn with the body's pain and weakness and disease, the mind shifts to the idea of release. I have heard more than one believer say to me on a hospital bed: "I'm tired. I'm ready to go. I want to go home."

Perhaps Simeon was old enough that life had become more struggle than joy. Perhaps he also had a

longing to go home. Simeon, we already saw, was just. That means he had trusted in God's forgiveness, placed his faith in the revealed God of Scripture, and was declared righteous by God. He did not fear to die. He was not afraid of what would happen next.

No, Simeon was like someone waiting for his passport to arrive. He had been told that he would see Messiah before he died. Perhaps he did not know how old Messiah would be, if he'd come riding into Jerusalem, or arrive some other way. But he knew, if God's Word was true, that his life would go on until he had seen Messiah. The sight of the Saviour was the arrival of the passport.

Simeon says, now you are letting me depart in peace. Now my pilgrimage ends, now you have kept your promise to me. What I have hoped for, prayed for, believed in, is here in physical form.

His heart can rest. Oh, he would not live to even see Messiah reach his teens. He would never see what Messiah would do to save. But he didn't need to. God had promised, God had kept the promise, and God had lovingly comforted this old man with a sight of the one month-old Saviour.

But look how content he is. He is not whining about money he never had. He is not complaining about how family or friends hurt him. He is not cynical about what he missed out on, or angry about experiences he never had. He is not regretting that he did not see more of the world, or have a healthier body, or been more well-known. He is not depressed that he hadn't made his mark in the world, or had more power, or more fame. He is not saddened that he did not have a better education or learn more.

He is essentially saying: my life is complete, I can now go.

The only way you have that attitude is if, like Simeon, you have made God's salvation the theme of your life. If God's Gospel and the meaning of life seen through its lens has been your life's work, then you come to the end and say, "I have been saved, I am saved, and I shall now be saved. I am complete. I have finished the work you gave me to do. I have seen your salvation in my own life, I have sought it for others, and my life is full."

The old saying is "You never realise Christ is all you need until Christ is all you have." For some believers, it requires God stripping them down to almost nothing until they finally confess, "In Christ, I am complete. If I have salvation, I have what I need for now and eternity. I can depart, but if He bids me stay, I will work for Him while I can."

Simeon is satisfied by salvation. Simeon was also amazed by

## **II. The Preparation of Salvation**

31 Which You have prepared before the face of all peoples,

Simeon knew that the salvation which so satisfied him was actually a global event. It was not some hidden, private spirituality. It was not something exclusively Jewish. It was a salvation which God had actually been preparing for several thousand years. He had been doing it in the presence of all nations, all ethnicities.

How had he done that? Here are a few.

After the Tower of Babel, he selected one Mesopotamian idolater named Abram, and separated him. He saved him, and began working with him and his children to make a people of faith, and a people of holiness. He eventually gave them a land of their own, a special law code, and most of all, a place where He would abide and they could come and worship Him. And to that people He gave all His special revelation, His prophecies. These people would be the hosts of the Saviour of the

world. These people would be the family and the ethnicity of the one to save mankind.

He also placed them along the strip of land that was the world's highway. Three continents met and traded along the coast of Israel: Africa, Europe and Asia Minor. Israel was where all the nations of the world would have to pass along to trade and travel from one side of the world to another. Israel didn't have to go to the world with the message of salvation, because the whole world came to Israel during that time. They passed along and would have asked about the people of Israel: their beliefs, their God, their Scriptures, their Law.

But then, God prepared many other things. God allowed what was called the times of the Gentiles: where a series of Gentile empires conquered the world and ruled over Israel. Babylon, Persia, Greece. Now, by the time of Simeon, the Roman Empire had reached a size unmatched by any empire before it. The so-called *pax romana* – Roman peace – was now in the world. People could travel and trade and communicate across a larger area than ever before. God prepared this salvation to spread.

The Roman Empire, with its military ambition, had devised an amazing communication and transportation system for their troops. This meant that as Christ grew up and completed His ministry, His message could be effectively carried to the farthest reaches of the known Roman world. The Gospel would spread by means of roads constructed by unbelieving Romans. In fact, Rome's efficient postal system meant that the New Testament letters, the revelation of the New Testament, spread throughout the empire of the time.

God also prepared this salvation to be understood. Three centuries before Christ, Alexander the Great conquered the world and established Greek as the common tongue spoken throughout the world. In about 250 B.C., the Greeks wanted a copy of the Old Testament in Greek. Well, what this did was introduce the revelation of God, the truths of Jehovah God, to the world at large. No longer did you need to know Hebrew to understand the truth about the Creator God, you could read about it in your own tongue and this played a great part in preparing the world for the Gospel. The one language meant that the life of Christ, as recorded in the Gospels, the letters of Paul, Peter, James, John and Jude could be read and understood by Gentiles in every part of the Roman empire.

Simeon says, you have prepared this salvation in the sight of all peoples. You have been gathering world history and world cultures, to now, in the fulness of time, come to this moment.

Anyone who reflects on his or her salvation should marvel at how empires were moved, nations were shaped, entire histories determined so that you could have a Saviour. We sometimes think salvation is a wave of the wand of our words: "I accept Jesus as Saviour". And the gift of salvation is received simply, like a child. But it can be received because it was prepared.

That leads him to the third thing about salvation:

### **III. The Purpose of Salvation**

A light to *bring* revelation to the Gentiles, And the glory of Your people Israel." (Lk. 2:32)

All Jews believed they were the chosen nation. But how they would end up as the sovereign ruling nation of the world, they did not agree. Some thought "angelic champion would come down, some thought God would simply break upon the Earth by supernatural means, some thought someone of David's line would come and restore Solomon's glory." But then there were a few who were known as "the Quiet in the Land. They had no dreams of violence and of power and of armies with banners; they believed in a life of constant prayer and quiet watchfulness until God should come. All their lives they waited quietly and patiently upon God. Simeon was like that; in prayer, in

worship, in humble and faithful expectation he was waiting for the day when God would comfort his people.”

Simeon understood the prophecies. Messiah would restore and rescue Israel, but only because Israel was His tool to reach the whole world. Ultimately the Messiah was for all men:

**Isa 9:2** The people who walked in darkness Have seen a great light; Those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, Upon them a light has shined.

**Isa 42:6** "I, the LORD, have called You in righteousness, And will hold Your hand; I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, As a light to the Gentiles,

Because the King of the whole Earth would be Jewish, it would necessarily be the glory of God's people Israel. If the King of all, reigns from Jerusalem, then Israel is highest in honour. But that does not come through the Roman way of destroying these nations entirely. It came through firstly providing atonement and offering mercy.

Through the ages, the world has missed the beautiful balance in Simeon's words. Many Gentiles have hated and despised the Jews for being the chosen people. They have either tried to persecute and harm Jews, or they have tried to explain away their chosen status, saying they once were chosen, but have now been rejected, or they lost their status, or that the true tribes of Israel are actually the whites, or that the Jews are behind conspiracies to take over the world. But all of it amounts to jealousy.

Many Jews have misunderstood their chosen status and despised Gentiles. They have seen Gentiles as dirty, unclean and simply jealous. They have assumed that chosen means superior, or meritorious. They have believed that to be saved, Gentiles have needed to become Jews, or that there would be separate ways of salvation for Jews and Gentiles.

But here is the simple balance: The Saviour of all ethnicities is a Jewish Saviour. The Messiah is the greatest Jewish gift to the whole world, and forever their greatest honour. Jewish people should be humbled that they were the chosen vessel to reveal God to the world, in the written Word, and the living Word.

Gentiles who see the light in Jesus should thank God for Israel, give honour where it is due, while thankfully receiving a Saviour that does not require them to become Jewish to be saved. They should receive the Jewish Saviour as the Saviour from their sins, not from their being Gentile. But they should honour the family and ethnicity of Jesus by forever eschewing anti-semitism, and giving the Jewish people special honour in the hearts, especially in prayer and evangelism.

Alfred Edersheim writes, “With this Infant in his arms, it was as if he stood on the mountain-height of prophetic vision, and watched the golden beams of sunrise far away over the isles of the Gentiles, and then gathering their full glow over his own beloved land and people.”

Salvation is pleasure to those who know it. Salvation should amaze us in its detailed and massive preparation. And then salvation should humble us all in its purpose: a chosen nation brings forth its King to save all people from their sin.

Simeon was not done after he finished his song. He prophetically knew that this Messiah was not going to be universally loved and received in Israel. So he spoke a personal word to Mary and Joseph.

33 And Joseph and His mother marveled at those things which were spoken of Him. 34 Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this *Child* is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against 35 "(yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." (Lk. 2:21-35)

Notice some unexpected things about this Messiah.

First, many will fall because of Him. Many will stumble and trip over Him, rejecting Him, and condemning themselves. He will bring a sword and divide households and tribes and rulers.

Second, many will rise because of Him. Many will repent and believe and be saved. Some estimates put the number of Jews that believed in Jesus in the first century at one million. A great number did recognise their Messiah.

Third, He will be spoken against. The name of Jesus became to the Jewish religious establishment a curse and a byword. He became a false prophet, a blasphemer and a deceiver. And when Christians began persecuting Jews in the name of Jesus, that only further increased the hostility to His name.

For many Jews, Jesus is the name at the root of all their troubles. He truly is the cornerstone that the builders have rejected and a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence.

Simeon tells Mary that her heart will be pierced by the sword of how He is treated. Indeed, she stood there at the cross, as her Son died the death of criminals.

Fourth, through him, the thoughts of many will be revealed. Messiah will become an instrument that reveals what men are really motivated by, what their treasures are, where their loves lie. The message of the gospel pierces right to the core of a man. It does not offer you another religion. It offers you another life – another you. It calls on you to forsake your gods, forsake yourself, forsake life lived for your glory and live it for Him.

Right now, these four are true of you. Jesus is either your rise or your fall. You know He is spoken against, still mocked, ridiculed, or worse, patronised as a good man. But He still reveals your thoughts. What do you love most? What do you want most?

If you are like Simeon, what you want most is a reconciled relationship with God. That was his pleasure. That was why he rejoiced in a salvation prepared and delivered, whose purpose is to save Jews and Gentiles through a Jewish Saviour.

Could you, this day, depart in peace? Could you die today, absolutely satisfied that you are in Him, and He in you?