

Christmas Eve at Grace

Life of Simeon

Luke 2:22-35

Dr. Matt Cassidy --- December 24, 2019

Merry Christmas! I'm glad you could join us. I want to tell you about one of our unforgettable Christmases at the Cassidy house. Years ago – or before Melinda, my wife – we would celebrate Christmas, and this particular Christmas was a legend in our family tradition now. Before Melinda came or had her influence upon us, the way we would do Christmas morning is we had this tradition – I think it goes all the way back to Ireland when the old Cassidys were living in a cave and we didn't have much time for things, I guess – but we would wake up our parents several times throughout the night, and then finally when the sun came up we were able to open presents. We would all stand by our presents and my mother would look at my father, my father would say, "Okay, you may begin." And then we would all just go after those presents. It was a frenzy. There are some of you who don't even have the stomach to watch this. And the whole thing was over in ninety seconds, maybe 120 seconds, and we were done. That's it.

Now, just so maybe you would respect me, Melinda came into our family and after two or three of these, she couldn't take it anymore. It was like, *I can't watch this*. We need to change things. And so, now we each individually open one present at a time and show gratitude towards that person, that gift-giver. And what's great is that now Christmas morning goes all the way to New Year's Eve. It just takes forever.

Anyway ... so growing up we didn't have a whole lot of gifts, we didn't give a lot of gifts, it was fine, it was all good. And on this one Christmas – it was the Irish Christmas still in those days – my brother had an especially good year financially. And I think he was making up for thirty-three years of missing out. Because that Christmas he gave his two boys – they were in elementary school – he gave them everything. He just gave each child everything, like all things. He bought a toy store, I think.

And so, it was the frenzy of opening, and Dad said go, and we open our gifts, and ninety-two seconds into this, we're done. And then we're watching my two nephews and they were just

getting started. And it was gift after gift after gift ... they had to have a water break. And then they just kept doing it. They did a wonderful job of being grateful after each gift and saying *thank you*, and then *next*, you know. And then I looked at my brother – this is prolonged – I looked at my brother and he looks at me. I raise my one eyebrow and he says, “I know, what have I done? What has happened?” And at the end of this, eventually, both the boys said this: “Is that all?” And “Is that all?” meant two things. One was, *Please don’t give me another gift. I have blisters on my hands here*. And, really, *Is that all?* Because it was like a college sociology experiment where we were testing the experiential law of diminishing returns. Which means --- most of the time, anyway – a lot of times – the more you have, the less you appreciate what you have. And this is what was happening right there in front of us all.

Why is that? I’ll tell you. Because men and women, boys and girls, were not made for stuff. We were made for more. We’re in the image of an eternal and everlasting God. And so, our souls long for eternal and everlasting things. So, whether you’re an elementary school kid in a room full of gifts, or you’re a grownup and you have your own island, it doesn’t matter. Because there’s still something missing; there’s something that is longing for more. Because stuff is fun – it is – but it’s not nutritious, not for your soul.

And today what I’d like to do is tell you this one story that happens in the Bible about an older man. And the longer you live, the more you long for eternity, because you become exhausted by things. You just become tired of it. There’s a word for it – it’s “homesick.” You become homesick, home being heaven.

And this story is a great story because it’s a story about an old man that’s desperately homesick and on Christmas he gets what his heart was longing for. The story is about a man named Simeon. It’s in the Book of Luke. He doesn’t make it to Christmas cards, he’s not in very many manger scenes, that’s for sure. But he is a very important part of the Christmas story. He’s a key player.

He’s an old man. He probably has great-grandchildren. He has seen his children grow up to be old themselves. But in his life he has experienced Rome, the government, becoming more arrogant and power-hungry, and, frankly, cruel, because they could. And he watched the religious leaders realize, *If you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em*. And they were becoming more corrupt over his long lifetime. And he was getting tired of that.

And in contrast to all of that, he maintained his hope in the Lord, the one that's in the Bible. It says here in Luke chapter 2, **"Now there was a man in Jerusalem and his name was Simeon. And he was righteous and devout and he was waiting for the consolation of Israel. And the Holy Spirit was upon him."** In light of everything else going on around him, it says that Simeon is a righteous man and devout. Devout means that he is devoted to the things of God. And he's a great man of faith because he was hoping for things that he could not see. And there was not much to see in the context of evidence of the consolation of Israel, and that would be that she would gain her rightful place in honor and showing love towards God; and God blessing Israel as a nation. And that's how he was living his life.

Now we don't know when in his life, in his devotion, in his devoutness – he was enjoying his prayers with God, and God gave him this special gift, and the gift was a promise. The promise was this, verse 26, the next sentence that comes after the one I just read. **"And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death until he had seen the Lord's Messiah."** He would not die until he saw the Lord's Messiah.

One of the things that I love about this sentence is this; that if you walk with the Lord for years with this sense of devotion and humility towards Him and you study the law and you live for Him and you allow the sufferings in life that you experience to not allow you to grow hard, but rather, to tenderize you; if you let injustice that you experience not make you bitter or brittle, but actually let it make you more kind towards other people; if that happens, you just might hear the very heart and the voice of God in your own prayer life. That's Simeon. And this is kind of the older Testament when this is happening. And it says that he won't die until he sees the Lord's Messiah. And Messiah means "promised one." And God gives him this gift and says, "You won't go to the grave until you see the fulfillment of all these promises."

And so, he's looking forward to this man, this promised one, who would bring comfort and joy, just like we sang, to all the world. And so, why did he keep living in his old age? Because he had a reason to live. And when you get older, every time you get out of bed, you have to have a reason why, because it's just not easy. The first thing you do when you get up in the morning when you're older – it's more of a circus act because the first thing you have to do is a tightrope thing where you get up and your head moves a little too fast and so you have to get your balance. And then you do *The Wizard of Oz* Tin Man to make sure your joints are working. *Okay? Okay. Muscles, please engage. Okay, muscles ... now, please engage.* And you do this

every day because you choose to. This man does this because he's been promised by God that he won't be breathing his last until he sees this promised Messiah.

Well, one day, clearly, when he's ultimately old, he gets up like he gets up every day. But he hears the voice again. And it is certain and urgent. It is gentle, it is intimate. And He says, "Simeon, this is that day. Get yourself to the temple."

Simeon must have thought, "This is the day! I will not see death until I see the Lord's anointed, until I see the Lord's Messiah." So, he gets up and he's going to the temple.

Meanwhile – there's another part of the story – a teenage couple, a husband and wife, Mary and Joseph and baby Jesus – they've realized they are following the laws of God, there is peace there, there is joy there, and so they're following the laws of God in the older Testament. And it says when your baby is forty days old, you go to the temple and you have him dedicated. You give an offering to the Lord as an expression of thanksgiving.

And so, they do that. They're a young couple. And when you're young in the Lord, you just follow the Law. You just do what it says, because there's so much safety in the Law, there's so much love to be found in the Law. You find the nature of God and the temperament of God when you read and obey the laws of God. You see in His Law the rhythms of life. And one of the rhythms of life is gratitude. And at forty days you do what you're told and you go and you give thanksgiving.

So, on the Temple Mount we have this young high school couple with a brand-new child. They're walking across from one side. And then you have Simeon walking from the other side. And this is an intersection of two different expressions of how we live for the Lord, of different kinds of hope. You have Simeon, who's living by the Spirit of the Lord and can hear His voice because he's old and he has learned the Lord's voice. And then you have a young couple that shouldn't be able and can't know that yet. They're too young to, but they can do what the Law says, and they're doing that. And so, they're both doing the same thing. They're both obedient to the Lord's direction in different ways of expressing the Lord's will. They don't necessarily understand what's happening, but they're just going to do what the Lord tells them to do.

And then Simeon sees that young couple and the Lord speaks to him – "This is who I've been telling you about." And at the speed of slow, because that's all that Simeon has, he gets there as quickly as he can and he reaches out his hands to hold the baby. Mary looks at Joseph – *Can we trust this old guy?* And Joseph says yes. And Simeon holds Jesus. His hands are shaking,

but he's been saving his strength for this moment. Thousands of promises over thousands of years, and now it's the culmination with this little boy. And this boy, this baby Jesus, this gift, is the promise and hope of Abraham and Jacob and Moses and Ruth and David and now, Simeon. But Simeon got what they didn't. He got to see the promise of Messiah in his lifetime.

And so, Simeon says this blessing, he says this prayer: "Oh, sovereign" – that means God's in control – **"Oh, sovereign Lord, as You promised me, you now dismiss Your servant in peace; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the sight of all the people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to Your people Israel."** You have come and given me this gift.

He is filled with hope that's fulfilled. And it says in the next sentence that Mary and Joseph, watching this, marveled at what they experienced.

So, at least in this Christmas story, it's a story of hope and it's a story of marvel. What do you hope for? Where do you find yourself being marveled? That's the story of people that live for the glory of God. They live being tugged. Your hearts are being tugged in a certain direction. Maybe there's a reason for restlessness, for maybe the anxiety that you might feel inside. Maybe it's God that's pulling you that way. What do you hope for? Where do you find marvel? Simeon now can sing that song, "You may now dismiss your servant." In other words, *Take me home. I can go home now.*

And what Simeon might ask you if he were here is this: *Is the world enough? If you had all the world, would that be enough?* Jesus would say if you forfeit your soul to gain the whole world, you've lost.

Simeon's vision for his life, what he'd hoped for, was as high as heaven, but as low as earth. He wanted both. He wanted heaven and earth. He wanted the here and now and he wanted the everlasting and the eternal. Like the Apostle Paul says in one of his books, **"To live is for Christ."** I'm all for that. **"But to die is to gain."**

When we sing we talk about heaven and earth. We say, "... and heaven and nature sing." I want all of it. I want the Lord to bless all of it. That's what we talk about when we talk about hope. I want the Lord to touch everything. That's what the Christmas story is about.

What are you waiting for this Christmas? What are you hoping for? Have you grown weary in things that can't nurture your heart? I want to invite you to become a marvel-er. I want to invite you to become a person of eternal hope, that the reason for restlessness and sometimes

loneliness is that you might seek something more, something eternal and something everlasting. Because the baby Jesus story does not end at the manger. Finally, this young man finds His way to a cross, and the cross's purpose is so that He could intervene for us and be like a substitutionary payment so that our debt would be paid to the Father for the sins that we committed; that He would take our shame and we would take on His honor. That He would become powerless so that we could receive the Spirit of God and be powerful over our own urges. Christmas is an early invitation for Good Friday and, ultimately, Easter Sunday, where God shows Himself more powerful than death.

Christmas is a gift-giving story because **“For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son”** – not so that we might just admire Him or enjoy Him as a good teacher, but that we would surrender ourselves to Him and call Him our king, and allow Him to take our place as our payment towards our debt; that we might receive honor and He would take our shame; that we would receive power and He would take our futility.

So, this Christmas Eve let me ask you – is that the kind of relationship you have with God, that's based entirely on the baby Jesus that becomes the King Jesus after the resurrection? That you have approval with God and you can enjoy intimacy with God by faith alone and the gift that's given in Christ alone? If not, I would love for you to make that decision today, tonight, Christmas Eve 2019.

And for some of you, maybe you've already made that decision. Here's what I'd like you to consider as an invitation. At Grace, we love knowing more, becoming devout in the teachings of Jesus and in the Old Testament. And next year starting January 5, we're going to read through and we're going to study the Bible all year long. We want to know and enjoy the power of the love of the Law and the freedom that it gives us. We'd love for you to join us. Find a great Bible-teaching church. If you can't get here on Sunday – people drive an hour to get here on Sundays – if you can't get here on Sundays will you please, maybe as a commitment to what God is doing in your heart this very moment, make a commitment to go to a good Bible-teaching church near you, that you might know the Lord, how He has communicated, how He loves you, how you can live for Him, live for something that will get you up in the morning until the last day of your life? That's our invitation today. Merry Christmas.

Let me pray.

Lord, we lift up that opportunity for some people here right now as I speak, that have never understood that they have a relationship with You, not because of what they've done, but because of what You did. They have a relationship with You because now they understand that they just bring their shortcomings and You cover those in the blood of Jesus. Lord, for the people that maybe even this day have finally come to answer the call that You've been giving them for years and certainly recently, I pray that they would respond to that calling, that they would surrender their life to You.

And Lord, I'd ask You also that some people that have not lived a life devoted to You, that they might change that this very evening, and that they would live their life surrendered to You, starting now; that they'd find a way to bend their knee, that their soul would reach and look at You and call You "King." They have grown weary of being in charge of their life. I ask that You would honor them with a commitment that they're making right now and bless them with a newfound devotion to You.

We are grateful for Christmas. We are grateful for Your loving gift of Jesus. We celebrate that. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.