

**“Luke’s Christmas Carols: Nunc Dimittis”**

**December 29, 2013**

**Luke 2:21-35**

**SI:** Finishing our study of four Christmas songs in of Luke.  
Come this morning to the song of Simeon.

The song traditionally called the Nunc Dimittis which means in Latin, Now depart.  
It comes from the opening words of the song when Simeon says:

Let your servant now depart in peace, for my eyes have seen your salvation.  
I’ve read this passage at the deathbed of several believers,  
most recently Michael Benoit.

Let your servant now depart in peace, for my eyes have seen your salvation—  
those are words of great faith and great comfort.

**INTRO:** I saw a book in the travel section of bookstore titled:

*1000 Places To See Before You Die.*

Lists and describes what the author thinks are the most interesting and beautiful places all over the world.

Grand Canyon, Versailles, Great Wall of China, Jerusalem, Great Barrier Reef, — that sort of thing, on and on, one thousand of them all over the world.

The Pyramids, the Swiss Alps, Stonehenge, Machu Pichu, the Ave Maria Grotto—1000 places to see before you die.

What do you want to see before you die?

In Luke 2 we are introduced to a man named Simeon.

We don't know anything about his personal life.

We don't know if he was married or if he had children.

We don't know what he did for a living, if he was rich or poor.

We don't even know how old he was—but it's obvious he was quite elderly.

Even though we don't know much about his outer life, we know lots about his inner life.

We are told that he was righteous and devout. A man of faith.

There was one great thing he wanted to see before he died.

He was waiting for the Consolation of Israel.

Which is another way of saying that he wanted to see how the Lord was going to fulfill all of his salvation promises to his chosen people through the Messiah.

At some point the Holy Spirit had given Simeon assurance that he would not die until he saw the very thing that he wanted to see.

Before he died he would see the Christ.

Christ means the anointed one—the Messiah.

He would see the one who would bring salvation to God's people.

On this particular day the Holy Spirit prompted him to go into the Temple.

There he saw a young couple with a baby.

They looked no different from any of the other people in Temple—just worshipers there to fulfill their biblical obligations to the Lord.

But Simeon knew this was what he wanted to see all his life, this baby was the salvation of God.

So he took the child in his arms and out came this song of praise to God.

In the song he says: Lord, my great expectation has been met.

Just as you've promised—

I've seen the one thing I longed all my life to see. Now I am ready to die.  
What do you want to see before you die? What's at the top of your list?  
For some people, the thing they want to see before they die is financial goals met.  
Because if I have enough money, then I will have security in old age.  
Or if I have everything together financially, will know I've been responsible.

For some people, the thing they want to see before they die is control  
over a certain part of their lives.

It's that time for New Year's resolutions.

Most of our resolutions have to do with matters of control  
regarding our bodies, our appetites, or our appearance.  
If only I could get control in this area, would be happier with myself.

Other people, before they die, want recognition and acceptance.

They want the favorable judgment of certain people.

They want to see themselves loved and admired in the eyes of people who matter.  
If only I can get my father's approval.  
Perhaps that approval is tied to success in a certain endeavor.

What do you want to see before you die?

Book of Ecclesiastes says that it is better to go to a funeral than a party—  
because death is the destiny of every man.

What I think that means—I'm not always sure what Ecclesiastes means—  
what I think it means is that it is good to be often reminded that your life is short.  
That reminder of your death strips away things of lesser importance.

There is one great expectation that is worthy to be put at the top of your list.

Like Simeon, you should long to see Jesus Christ.  
Seeing Jesus Christ not only brings contentment in this life—  
but it is the one thing that lasts through death and into the life to come.

Seeing your financial goals met, seeing all your fondest dreams of acceptance  
and admiration, self-control, and security met will never bring  
you the confidence in death that seeing Christ will.

What does it mean to see Christ?

You have to know what it means in order to long for it.

Simeon saw the baby Jesus with physical eyes in the Temple.

We can't do that now. The time has passed.

But you know that Simeon's sight was much deeper than his physical vision.

We too can see Jesus with sight that goes beyond our physical eyes.

Let's look at Simeon's song and story to answer this question:

What does it mean to see Christ?

As we answer question you will see why this should be

your highest resolution for this new year—

and the great expectation of your life.

Three things.

## **MP#1 Seeing Christ means believing in Him.**

The Bible often describes seeing as believing.

To truly see something is to believe in it or to trust it.

Why didn't everyone in the Temple that day gather around Mary and Joseph and praise God like Simeon did for the baby Jesus.

Only Simeon and an elderly woman named Anna, who Luke mentions in the verses right after this saw the baby Jesus for who he was.

Everyone else in the Temple that day who saw the baby Jesus—just saw him as an ordinary baby.

After Simeon took baby Jesus in his arms he said:

Sovereign Lord, my eyes have seen your salvation.

He saw this child as the one who had come to bring the forgiveness of his sins and make things right with God.

Besides Anna—Mary and Joseph, no one else in the Temple that day saw Jesus their Savior.

This was true for the rest of Jesus' life and ministry.

Thousands of people saw him—great multitudes.

He fed the 5,000—that was just the men—as many as 20,000 people there.

Fed 4,000. There were the crowds in Jerusalem.

But just seeing him with physical eyes did not do anything.

Many who saw him do miracles, later shouted for his crucifixion.

Same is true today.

Many people see Jesus Christ. They see his name written.

They see symbols of Christ—crosses, churches, Bibles.

They hear his name spoken on radio, television, conversations.

They even hear “Jesus Christ” used as an expletive.

In Walker Percy's novel *Love In The Ruins*, he describes America as being “Christ-haunted.” And it is.

In spite of secularism, reminders of Christ are still everywhere in America

But some people just see him and others really see him as their Savior.

And this will be true on the Last Day when Jesus comes again—

every eye will see him—but some will shout praises to their Savior—

others will curse and beg mountains to fall on them so don't have to look.

Why is this? Why did Simeon see Jesus truly and believe—others didn't?

Told three times that the Holy Spirit was on him.

It is the work of the Holy Spirit who opens people's eyes spiritually so they can see Jesus Christ as their Savior.

It's not a matter of just hearing about Jesus, just hearing the Gospel.

You can see him over and over again—

but until the Holy Spirit works, you will never really see Jesus as Savior.

Do you remember story Dr. Frank Barker told when he was here seven years ago at the dedication service for this sanctuary?

He said that when he enrolled in seminary, he was not a Christian.

He really believed in Jesus as his Savior in his second year.

He asked an older Christian: Why didn't Martin Luther know the Gospel?

Why didn't he know about trusting Jesus as your Savior?

Older Christian said: What do you mean?

Dr. Barker said: Last year I had to read Luther's commentary on Galatians, and it says nothing at all about trusting Jesus as your Savior.

Man said: Go back and read it again.

I read it again and the Gospel was on every page. I just couldn't see it before.

Holy Spirit had opened his eyes to trust Jesus as Savior.

Your great desire should be to believe in him.

You may say: I already do. I've believed in Jesus for years.

Good. But faith in Christ is not something you do once and then move on to the next thing.

Faith in Christ as your Savior is the beginning of your Christian life—  
but it is that same faith that you live with every day.

Your desire should be to see Him as your Savior more clearly—  
that your faith—by work of Holy Spirit—grows stronger every year.

The benefit will be what you see in Simeon's life—assurance.

Rock solid assurance that the Savior has done his work—  
and that all is right between you and God.

If know all is right between you and God through Jesus Christ—

then you can put everything else—bad or good—in proper perspective.

Look even at your death and say: Let your servant now depart in peace.

Seeing Christ means believing in him.

Do you believe? Is your faith and trust growing?

Make that a resolution for this year.

## **MP#2 Seeing Christ means following after him.**

Bible often connects seeing with light.

Those who are in the darkness stumble because they cannot see—  
but a light on the path shows the way.

John 1: True light that gives light to every man coming into the world.

When Simeon took Jesus in his arms he sang that this child was:  
a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.

Jesus is light and glory.

Let's consider each of these.

A light for revelation means that he shows who God is and what he is like.

Simeon specifically mentioned revelation to the Gentiles—

because the Gentile nations at the time did not have any revelation of true God.

They all had gods—the Romans had their gods—but did not know true God.

Needed light because they were walking in darkness.

Jesus came to bring that light.

Simeon was prophesying the missionary movement of Christianity.

He saw that one day knowledge of Christ would spread to all nations.

Everyone imagines that he or she knows what God really like.

There are as many different ideas of God as there are people in the world.

How do you know who God really is and what he is like?

By seeing Jesus Christ.

By seeing his person, character, concerns, the way he dealt with people.

Jesus was completely gracious. He was always extending forgiveness and healing  
freely to everyone who came to him. He never turned anyone away.

He also talked more about hell than anyone else in the Bible.

Jesus was patient and gentle towards people who were humble and broken—  
but he was harsh toward the proud and self-righteous.

He said unequivocally that there is no salvation apart from Him.

Every one of us, even in church, even Christians, have our ideas of what God like.

Our own personal opinions are always wrong.

Personal opinions about God are walking in darkness—Jesus is the light.

Seeing Christ means looking at Him to learn and believe what God like.

What does it mean that Jesus is glory, specifically, Glory for the people of Israel?

In Hebrew, the word glory comes from the root word for weight, heaviness.

Simeon a Jew, thinks and speaks in Hebrew terms and categories.

For the Hebrew, the glory of something is its weightiness—it's importance. We have similar expressions today.

We say a person is a heavyweight. He's a heavyweight in local politics. He's important. He has glory in that field.

We talk about a person throwing his weight around. That's a negative thing.

It means he has influence. He has importance and glory and he's willing to use it. Or we say a person made a weighty remark—one with real substance to it.

It makes everything else that is said seem light by comparison.

So when we see Christ as glory of his people Israel.

That means through Christ his people know what is really important.

They know what has real weight.

As they follow him, this becomes their glory as well.

How easy it is for a person to waste his life.

So many people do. Have one life and they waste it.

Come to the end and the things they have poured themselves into achieving mean nothing when they face the grave.

Marvin Olasky is the editor of World Magazine, Christian weekly news magazine.

The last issue of the year contains a number of obituaries of prominent people who died in 2013. One of those was Al Goldstein, who died at 77.

I had never heard of him, but he was a prominent pornographer.

Married five times and but died alone. This is what he wrote just before death.

"I'm losing my teeth, and life sucks. ... Christine and I broke up. 40 years is too big an age difference. ... I'm old news, I'm yesterday's paper on the bottom of a bird cage. ... My son and I haven't talked to in eight years ... he didn't invite me to graduation at Harvard. Basically life sucks. I won't kill myself but I would love to die. I would love to die because I feel that if there was a relationship ... I ruined it. I went for hedonism instead of building up intimacy. I have been the biggest fool in the world."

That's an extreme case, but in the end, everyone will ask, what have I followed?

Jesus Christ is light and glory.

If you see him as he is he will lead you to what is really important.

Sum of all is to love God with all heart, soul, strength, mind—  
love neighbor as your self.

As you follow him, he gives not only shows you the way, he empowers you through his Holy Spirit.

Make that a resolution this year, to follow after Jesus.

In following him, to chase after the things that are really important.



### **MP#3 Seeing Christ means suffering with him.**

If you had never read Luke before. If you didn't know anything about Jesus and you were reading this story for the very first time, you would have the impression that his life was going to be one victory after another.

The great predictions of the ancient prophets were coming to pass.

Angels had appeared to make the announcement of the forerunner of the Messiah—the birth of John the Baptist, just as foretold in Malachi.

The angel Gabriel had appeared to Mary to announce that she would bear the long-awaited King of kings who would save his people.

In all of the songs of Luke to this point—

Mary's song, Zechariah's song, the angels' song—the themes are all victorious. Vindication, triumph, conquest. The nations bowing to the Messiah.

And Simeon's song is the same—revelation to the Gentiles, glory to Israel.

But then Simeon said something that cast a dark cloud, like cold water in the face.

He said: This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.

I'm sure with that last word, a chill went up Mary's spine.

Because Simeon was saying, this child will divide people.

There will be some for him, but many against him.

And he's going to suffer. He's going to hurt.

And mother, when you see that, it's going to pierce you.

Those who loved him, his mother Mary in particular, were going to discover that loving him would bring sadness and pain.

People would speak hatefully about him. Mary would hear that.

Eventually, she would have to watch her son suffer and die, standing beside the cross as his life blood ebbed out of him in the agony of the crucifixion.

The disciples would learn as they followed Jesus to the end of his life, that he entered this world to suffer and die.

That is not what they expected at first. They thought it would be all victories.

It was one of the hardest lessons they had to learn.

If you look at the Gospels, you will see that opposition to Christ and his suffering is the biggest part of the story.

One New Testament scholar has pointed out that all the Gospels, M, M, L, J—only tell us about 100 days of Jesus' life.

But for the last two or three days, they provide almost hour-by-hour detail.

The suffering of Jesus, his opposition, the sword piercing the heart of his followers, that is going to prove to be the biggest part of the story.

And you know that this is the emphasis of the rest of the New Testament.

Paul said: We preach Christ crucified.

Yes, all the great prophecies are coming true. Christ is conquering the nations.

Men and women and children are bowing the knee to him from every tribe, and language and people and nation.

But that victory comes through suffering.

What does that mean for us?

It means that if we want to see Jesus, we are going to suffer with him.

His life set the pattern. Suffering before triumph. The cross before the crown.

Remember what Jesus said:

If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.

And as Paul put it in Acts 14:

through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.

In the middle of WWII, in April of 1944, two months before the D-Day,

C.S. Lewis spoke to a large audience of British factory workers.

A set of questions had been prepared and he answered them one by one.

It was a time of terrible suffering in Europe and Great Britain.

People were worried, they were grieving, and they had no idea how much more pain awaited them before the war came to an end. One question:

Which of the religions of the world gives to its followers the greatest happiness?

Which of the religions of the world gives to its followers the greatest happiness? While it lasts, the religion of worshipping oneself is the best. I have an elderly acquaintance of about eighty, who has lived a life of unbroken selfishness and self-admiration from the earliest years, and is, more or less, I regret to say, one of the happiest men I know. From the moral point of view it is very difficult! I am not approaching the question from that angle. As you perhaps know, I haven't always been a Christian. I didn't go to religion to make me happy. I always knew a bottle of Port would do that. If you want a religion to make you feel really comfortable, I certainly don't recommend Christianity.

So much more he could have said: Suffering essential for life and faith.

Elaborated on "while it lasts." But Lewis was master of understatement.

He was being profoundly honest.

Christ suffered because he knew what would follow.

For the joy set before him he endured the cross, suffering its shame...

His suffering opened the way to a life of everlasting satisfaction, fulfillment, love, and joy for vast multitudes of human beings.

Simple point is that we follow him in this.

Our suffering in many ways fits and prepares us for what God has in store.

Deitrich Bonhoffer said:

“Pain is a holy angel, who shows treasures to men which otherwise remain forever hidden; through [it] men have become greater than through all the joys of the world.”

It may be that this year you suffer. Make it your resolution to suffer with Jesus.

Seek him in your pain.

Don't run from him and look for consolation elsewhere.

There is suffering often associated with the life of faith—

but through that comes our salvation.

Make it your resolution to see Jesus this year.

Believe in him.

Follow after him.

Suffer with him.