

“Your Ultimate Desire”—Luke 2:28-32

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “Your Ultimate Desire”, is Luke 2:28-32 → Simeon *took Jesus up in his arms and blessed God and said, “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.”* This is the text.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus:

A number of years ago a movie was released entitled “The Bucket List.” It portrayed a man who was terminally ill making a list of all the things he would endeavor to experience before he “kicked the bucket”—that is, before he died. It would seem a natural response of many people when receiving news of terminal illness to figure out what they’d like to do with the rest of their life in light of it possibly being cut short.

It begs the question: What would be the one experience you desire the most before dying? Tough question? Aside from the fact that most people would rather not think of their death it can be a difficult question to answer for many. For some it may make them cherish more the relationships of family and friends with a desire to spend as much time

with them as possible. For others it may send them spinning into a mode of hopelessness and despair. Others may delve into intense efforts to right the wrongs they've done in life with the hopes they can get into heaven.

Knowing the one most desirable experience before dying was not a difficult question for a man by the name of Simeon to whom we are introduced in our text. Luke 2:25 describes Simeon as a *righteous and devout* man who was *waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him*. He had somehow received a revelation from the Holy Spirit that *he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ*. (cf. Luke 2:26) There were many of God's faithful people who wanted to see the coming of the Messiah and experience the fulfillment of God's promises. Apparently Simeon had a special promise from the LORD in this regard!

As Simeon encountered the baby Jesus in the temple he could not help but praise God because the LORD had kept His promise to him. Encountering babies in the temple for circumcision or dedication to Yahweh was actually rather commonplace for Simeon. The practice of women presenting themselves at the temple to offer the appropriate sacrifice for spiritual cleansing after childbirth was required by Old Testament law. However, Jesus was recognized by Simeon as the Christ because Simeon had the eyesight of faith given him by the Holy Spirit.

He immediately burst forth in a Spirit-inspired song which the liturgy titles the “Nunc Dimittis”—Latin meaning “now depart.”

Simeon was actually expressing deep contentment in his song. In verse 29 He said: *Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your Word.* It could be translated as a prayer: *Lord, now let Your servant depart in peace* (that is, die). In order to pray such a prayer you must have a sense of peace and contentment in your life. Simeon appears to have such contentment as his desire to see the Messiah became a reality for him.

The search for contentment in life is basic to human desire. The real focus of such a search is where to find it. Unfortunately many look for contentment in the wrong places only to be “let down” and disappointed. Thus, in the midst of much discontentment and even despair from unfulfilled expectations, restlessness finds people moving from one thing to the next, from one relationship to the next, from one “god” to the next “god,” in a desperate search for satisfaction in life. They don’t realize that it can only be found in one place.

Simeon expressed the basis for his contentment in verse 30 of our text as he prayed, *my eyes have seen Your salvation.* Contentment comes only when a person “sees” God’s salvation in the presence of Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is a Spirit-wrought faith in your heart.

No, we have not received the privilege of cuddling baby Jesus in our arms as Simeon did. However, we have the privilege of experiencing His presence in many ways. We can encounter Jesus daily through His written Word. We can encounter Him through His body—those who believe in Him—gathered to receive His body and blood in Communion during worship. We express the same attitude of Simeon after we have partaken of the Lord’s Supper by singing the same words: “Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace according to Thy word, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people.” (LSB p. 199)

Simeon’s “Christmas carol” reflects God’s faithfulness in keeping His promises which He prepared in advance to accomplish in peoples’ lives. According to verse 31 of our text God ***prepared*** this *salvation . . . in the presence of all peoples*. The prophet Haggai had promised that *the desire of all nations would come* (cf. Haggai 2:7 KJV), and come He did in the Person & Work of Jesus. He is the repentant sinner’s ultimate desire!

God had made just the right preparations so that Simeon could “celebrate Christmas” by seeing the *salvation that Yahweh had prepared in the presence of all peoples* and for all peoples! Along with Simeon all of us are privileged to receive the benefits of those preparations through faith since Jesus’ salvation is for ***all peoples***! God wants ***everyone*** to see Jesus by faith and join in singing praises to Him!

Thus, giving us the gift of the Babe in Bethlehem involved a specific timetable for the LORD. Galatians 4:4 says that *when **the fullness of time had come**, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law*. Why did Mary, Joseph and Jesus meet Simeon in the temple? Because they were fulfilling the requirements of *the law* according to **God's timing!** Simeon's song reflects his joy not just in seeing the Christ Child but also in the fact that God's preparations and promises came to life in every detail!

Faith moves us to live, trusting in God's great and many promises to us in His written Word. This can be rather challenging at times because it means waiting for the LORD to act in His time, in His way, according to His plan. We are not told how much time elapsed from the revelation Simeon received concerning his seeing the Christ to its actual fulfillment. However, we do get the impression that he waited patiently and may have said or sang the words of Psalms 27:13 many times: *I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living!*

Verse 32 of our text refers to Jesus as *a light for revelation to the Gentiles*. Since the Gentiles did not have the revealed knowledge of God's promises in the Scriptures they needed special *revelation*. They were truly living in spiritual darkness on a path to hell. At the same time, the *light for revelation* would come to the nations through His *people*

Israel. Jesus would bring *glory to God's people Israel* as they had the privilege of experiencing the ultimate fulfillment of God's love and grace which was pictured in their religious ceremonial requirements! Unless those requirements were done by faith in the promised Messiah, the baby which Simeon held in His arms, they too were living in spiritual darkness on a path to hell.

Even Mary and Joseph could not receive the benefits of offering the appropriate sacrifices for her purification (cf. Luke 2:22-24) **without faith in their son as the Son of God, the Messiah, their own Redeemer from sin!** They were doing a requirement of the law in the presence of the very One Who was sent to fulfill that law.

Faith in the accomplished work of Jesus Christ brings peace and contentment in God's faithfulness because He keeps His promises. Those blessings come through confession of your sins and trust in Jesus your Savior, your soul's ultimate desire. In humble repentance you are enlightened with God's grace, forgiveness and love in Christ Jesus.

The words of the Nunc Dimittis are actually saying, "It doesn't get any better than this!" Experiencing the salvation of our God in light of Jesus Christ compares to no other experience on "the bucket list" of life. It brings a peace with God which removes the desperate search for contentment in life and finds fulfillment in life wrapped up in the Baby of Bethlehem, your ultimate desire. Amen.

*Delight yourself in the LORD,
and He will give you the desires of your heart.
Commit your way to the LORD; trust in Him, and He will act.*

(Psalm 37:4-5)

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