

“MY EYES HAVE SEEN YOUR SALVATION”

**I. Introduction**

- A. What would need to happen in your life before you could say that you are ready to die, that you would be content to take your last breath and depart from this world?
1. One approach to this question that has become popular in recent years is for people to come up with what they call a “bucket list”, a list of the things that they want to do before they die.
  2. A more traditional approach is for people to make sure that they have their affairs in order and that their surviving family members will be taken care of in the event of their death.
  3. Of course it is good to be well-organized and responsible.
  4. And there is nothing wrong with pursuing certain experiences as long as those things are not sinful and as long as we are not being selfish or irresponsible in pursuing them.
  5. The problem is that these ways of preparing for death only focus on the affairs of this world.
  6. They do not provide any peace about what will happen to you after you die.
- B. In the text that we have just read, Simeon says that he is ready to depart from this world in peace.
1. The thing that enables him to say this is that he has seen God’s salvation in Jesus Christ.
  2. As we study this passage today, we will consider four things that it tells us about this salvation.

3. In doing so, we will better understand why the only thing that can truly prepare us for death is seeing God's salvation in Christ.

## II. The Fulfillment of the Law

- A. The first thing that this passage tells us about the salvation that God has provided in Jesus Christ is that it entailed the fulfillment of the law.
  1. Luke says that Jesus was circumcised eight days after his birth, in accordance with God's command in Genesis 17.
  2. Under the old covenant, the rite of circumcision symbolized the need for cleansing from sin, and it functioned as a seal of God's promise to provide cleansing for his people.
  3. Jesus did not have any sin of his own from which he needed to be cleansed, but he received the sign of circumcision because of his solidarity with those he came to save.
  4. He came to secure the reality that was foreshadowed by circumcision.
  5. This is why Paul describes the cross as "the circumcision of Christ" in Colossians 2.
  6. Jesus was cut off and made a curse in order that the righteous requirements of God's law could be met in all who believe in him.
- B. Jesus' parents also kept the law's requirement for purification after childbirth.
  1. In Leviticus 12, God said that a mother and her newborn son were ceremonially impure for forty days after the child's birth.
  2. In order to be cleansed from this ritual impurity, the Israelites were instructed to bring a sacrifice to the temple at the end of the forty day period.

3. They were commanded to sacrifice a lamb and a pigeon, or if they could not afford a lamb they could bring two pigeons.
  4. The fact that Joseph and Mary were only able to offer two pigeons is an important detail.
  5. It tells us that our Lord was born into poverty.
- C. The other reason why Jesus' parents brought him to the temple was to present him to the Lord.
1. This was in accordance with what the Lord commanded in Exodus 13, telling his people that all the firstborn in Israel were set apart to the Lord and therefore had to be redeemed.
  2. This was a perpetual reminder of Israel's deliverance from Egypt, when their firstborn were spared from the plague that the Lord sent upon the firstborn of the Egyptians.
- D. All three of these rites — circumcision, purification, and the redemption of the firstborn — were symbolic of the state of sin into which all human beings are born.
1. These rites taught the doctrine of original sin.
  2. Jesus underwent these rites even though he did not have any sin of his own.
  3. This calls our attention to the fact that he voluntarily placed himself under the law and took its obligations upon himself.
  4. As Paul says in Galatians 4:4, "when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons."
  5. Even from infancy, Jesus perfectly kept the Law of the Lord.

### III. Consolation and Light

- A. This brings us to the second thing that this passage tells us about God's salvation: it brings consolation and light.
1. Luke tells us that while Joseph and Mary were presenting Jesus at the temple, they were met by an old man named Simeon.
  2. Simeon was a righteous and devout man, a man who was waiting for "the consolation of Israel."
  3. That phrase refers to Israel's Messianic hope, their hope that the Lord would send an anointed deliverer who would reign on David's throne forever.
  4. The fact that Simeon is singled out as one who was waiting for Israel's consolation suggests that there were not many in Israel who were waiting for that consolation.
  5. Instead of trusting the Lord to be faithful to his promise to provide the righteousness that they lacked, they put their hope in their own performance of the law.
  6. But because Simeon believed that salvation belongs to the Lord, he kept on waiting in faith for God's salvation to be revealed.
  7. He was a part of Israel's remnant, chosen by grace. (see Rom. 11:5)
- B. Even though we live at a different point in redemptive history, we too need to wait for God's promised consolation.
1. We have not yet entered into the fullness of our inheritance as sons of God.
  2. While the Spirit of God presently indwells us and applies Christ's redemption to us, we still groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for that day when we will be revealed as the sons of God.

3. We long for the day when all the suffering, sadness, and evil of this world will be brought to an end.
  4. We yearn to be set free from the indwelling sin that clings so closely to everything that we do.
  5. As long as these things remain in the future, we need to wait with the same kind of faith that Simeon had.
  6. As John Calvin reminds us in a sermon he preached on this text, "faith cannot exist without patience." [*Songs of the Nativity*, 160]
- C. Simeon had been told by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he saw the Messiah.
1. As the Spirit led him to the temple that day, his eyes were enlightened so that he could see that this was no ordinary child.
  2. He saw that this was the Lord's Christ.
  3. Then he responded by taking the child in his arms and blessing God for letting him see his salvation.
  4. The song that Simeon sang that day is known as the *Nunc Dimittis* because those are the first words of the song in the Latin Vulgate.
  5. This phrase means, "Now you dismiss."
  6. It is as though Simeon had been instructed to keep watch through a long night, and the long-expected dawn has finally come.
- D. The salvation that Simeon sees in Christ is for both Jews and Gentiles, in fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12 that the nations would be blessed through him.
1. The Messiah brings light to the Gentiles, the people who had lived in utter darkness for so many years.

2. Unlike the Jews, the Gentiles did not have access to special revelation prior to Christ's coming.
3. But now the light of God's truth is being held forth to all the peoples of the world.
4. We need light, because the fall has plunged this world into deep darkness.
5. Even the light that people think they have only leads them further away from God.
6. We don't have to look very hard to see the world's darkness.
7. It is all around us.
8. There is the darkness of error, the darkness of evil, the darkness of denial, the darkness of despair.
9. Only the light of Christ can dispel this darkness.
10. Until he shines on us, we are all utterly destitute of spiritual light.
11. The great blessing that we enjoy as God's children is that we have been delivered from the domain of darkness and transferred to the kingdom of God's beloved Son.
12. In Christ God has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.
13. This is why we should walk in this world as children of light, taking no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead exposing them.

#### **IV. The Fall and Rising of Many**

- A. The next thing that our text tells us about God's salvation is that it brings about the fall and rising of many.

1. Jesus is both a stone of stumbling and the cornerstone upon which his church is being built.
  2. As Peter says in his first epistle, "As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in Scripture: 'Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.' So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,' and 'A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.' They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do." (1 Pet 2:4-8 ESV)
  3. There is no possibility of neutrality toward Jesus.
  4. You will either have Jesus as your cornerstone or you will have him as your stone of stumbling.
  5. He will either bring about your resurrection or your ruin.
  6. Those who persist in thinking that they can stand before God by their own merit and their own power stumble over Christ unto their eternal destruction.
  7. But those who humble themselves and trust in Christ are lifted up to eternal life.
- B. Simeon also tells Mary that her son is appointed as a sign that is opposed.
1. This opposition will be a source of intense grief to Mary, grief that is likened to a sword piercing through her soul.
  2. Mary will see people telling Jesus that he is in league with Satan.
  3. She will see her son betrayed by one of his closest friends.

4. She will see him dying on a Roman cross.
  5. Opposition to Jesus reveals the thoughts of people's hearts.
  6. Many of those who were drawn to Jesus when they saw him performing miracles turned their backs on him when they saw him condemned to the cursed death of the cross.
  7. The same dynamic continues today.
  8. Wherever the true church is persecuted, or opposed, or marginalized, hypocrites are exposed.
  9. There are many people who are willing to be a part of a church as long as it satisfies some felt need and makes no serious demands of them.
  10. But such people have no interest in professing Christ if doing so is costly or unpopular or inconvenient.
- C. We always need to remember that if the world opposed Christ, it will also oppose those who follow him.
1. While we should do what we can to live peaceably with all people, there are going to be times when our loyalty to Christ will cost us the friendship of the world.
  2. This present age is under the dominion of Satan.
  3. And as John Newton once wrote to a Christian lady: "Be thankful, my dear, that [Satan] treats you as his enemy; for miserable is the state of those to whom he behaves as a friend."

## V. Redemption

- A. This brings us to the last thing that this passage says about God's salvation, which is that this salvation is a matter of redemption.

1. We see this in the last part of the text, where Luke tells us about another individual who was at the temple that day.
  2. An eighty-four year old woman named Anna was present.
  3. Anna had the gift of prophecy, something that was quite rare in those days.
  4. She had suffered the loss of her husband after only seven years of marriage.
  5. Assuming that she was married at the typical age in that culture, this means she lived as a widow for about sixty years.
  6. A woman in her circumstances might find it easy to grow bitter or give up hope, but that is not what Anna did.
  7. Instead, she drew near to her God.
  8. She found refuge in the courts of the Lord, and she devoted herself to worship, prayer, and fasting.
  9. In all likelihood, she fasted in order to express her sorrow over the state of God's people in her day.
  10. Like Simeon, she too was part of the believing remnant in Israel.
- B. When Anna saw the infant Jesus that day, she responded by giving thanks to God and speaking of God's salvation to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.
1. As we noted earlier, there were not many in Israel who were truly waiting for redemption.
  2. Of course, they wanted to be set free from the Romans, but they had lost sight of the fact that they needed a redemption that entailed much more than just deliverance from political oppression.

3. The idea of redemption points back to Israel's exodus from Egypt, which is the prime instance of redemption in the Old Testament.
4. In that great event, the Lord demonstrated what redemption is.
5. He showed that redemption includes deliverance from an objective realm of evil and from an inward state of spiritual degradation. [see Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 110, 111]
6. This is the redemption that Jesus brings to those who trust in him.
7. He sets us free from this evil age, this world that is under the despotic control of Satan.
8. And he saves us from our bondage to sin and from the divine wrath that our sin incurs.

## VI. Conclusion

- A. There is a story about the jazz saxophonist John Coltrane that relates to this passage.
  1. On one occasion, after he gave an exquisite performance of a particular piece that he had written, Coltrane uttered the words *Nunc Dimittis*.
  2. He was saying that, having performed that piece so perfectly, he was ready to die.
  3. He was telling God, 'Now that I have done this, I am ready to depart in peace.'
- B. This story is sometimes cited to illustrate the Christian doctrine of vocation, and I suppose there is a sense in which it does.
  1. But Coltrane himself was not a Christian.
  2. His religious beliefs were vague and eclectic.

3. And when when he said *Nunc Dimittis* after that exceptional performance, he was saying something entirely different than what Simeon was saying when he took up the baby Jesus in his arms.
4. Coltrane was saying that he was ready to leave this world because *he* had accomplished something great.
5. Simeon was saying that he was ready to leave this world because he had seen the great thing that *God* accomplished — he had seen God's salvation.
6. That is what enables a person to depart from this world and enter into the next world in a state of true peace with God.
7. If you have seen God's salvation, if you have laid hold of that salvation by receiving and resting upon Jesus Christ alone by faith, then you are ready to leave this world.
8. You will be able to depart in peace whenever God is pleased to call you out of this world and bring you to your eternal home in glory.