

In 2006, sportswriter Bill Simmons released a book entitled: “Now I Can Die in Peace.” It was about the Red Sox victory in the 2004 World Series, and how some Red Sox fans had waited so long for a World Series title that they felt they could now, well, go in peace. Their dream of a championship had been fulfilled.

In today’s gospel lesson from Luke 2, we meet a man named Simeon, and we learn that “it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death until he had seen the Lord’s Christ.” The Holy Spirit of God had communicated to Simeon that he would get to see the promised Messiah with his own eyes. Here in the gospel, we observe that fulfillment, and we get to view Simeon’s reaction, which is along the lines of “now I can die in peace.” He passes in and out of Jesus’ story so quickly—so let’s take a look at how we can wait like Simeon; see like Simeon; and depart like Simeon.

First, wait like Simeon. Luke introduces us to him like this: “Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.” This is someone who clearly was right with God, but even so, this is someone being forced to wait. Luke tells us that Simeon was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and Israel definitely needed consolation. Their history as God’s people was not good. Their disobedience had meant punishment; it had meant being forcibly removed from their homeland; even now, having returned to Jerusalem, the Romans occupied their land and called the shots. Consolation would only come when the Messiah came. Simeon was waiting for it. That doesn’t mean it was easy.

Simeon can remind us that sometimes God’s answer to our prayers is: “You’re going to have to wait.” That’s usually not the answer that we want. We have to learn to accept that when God makes us wait, there’s a good reason for it. There are times when waiting is the best thing we could possibly do, even if we’re forced to do it. It can be a time of growth. We may not be ready for what we think we want. There may be details that have to be worked out that are known only to God. Regardless of what it is you’re waiting for, you can wait confidently, because God always keeps His Word.

That’s what Simeon discovered. Remember, the Holy Spirit had let him know that he would not die before seeing the Lord’s Christ, so he knew his waiting would have an end point. One day, led by the Spirit, he went to the temple, and just like that, the wait was over. The baby Jesus was there with his parents, and filled with the Spirit, Simeon took Jesus in his arms and blessed God with these words: “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.”

We need to see like Simeon. What did he see? He said, “my eyes have seen your salvation...” In one bright moment, he saw what God was up to. Jesus was the consolation he had been waiting for. This type of seeing does not happen just with the eyes, but with the mind

and the heart. This type of seeing is caused by the Holy Spirit, and this seeing is focused on Jesus. Simeon holds this baby in his arms and proclaims for all to hear that this child, Jesus, is salvation for all people, no matter where you're from. To have and to hold this Jesus is to have every promise of God fulfilled.

"Seeing like Simeon" means that you "see" that Jesus is salvation. He doesn't give you a list of rules to follow to get salvation; he does the work of saving you. He doesn't give you advice for a better life; Jesus is life; life that never ends. The Bible teaches that you cannot produce salvation by what you do; no matter how nice you are to people; no matter how successful you are or how many people look up to you, you cannot redeem yourself. "Seeing like Simeon" means that you "see" there is only one key that unlocks heaven, and it is Jesus. It means believing that Jesus paid for your sins at his cross. It means trusting that you will follow Jesus out of the grave, thanks to his Easter victory. It means that knowing, loving, and serving Jesus is the point of your life, and that he is your consolation. He is your security. And as Simeon reminds us, Jesus is not just your consolation, but the consolation of the whole world. He is light and glory for all.

So, we can wait like Simeon, we can see like Simeon, and we can depart like Simeon. Again, Simeon waited to see the Christ, and when that moment arrived, the first thing he said was: "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word." You know what he's saying, right? *Now I can die in peace because God kept his promise to me. I have seen salvation, and it is Jesus.*

Are you prepared to depart like Simeon? One of the great gifts of the gospel is that you don't have to be terrified of death, because Jesus has reversed its effects. You don't have to be afraid of being judged by God, because the judgment has already happened. Jesus was judged, sentenced, executed, and raised to new life. The only part that attaches to you is the new life. Jesus took all the consequences of our law-breaking and paid for our disobedience himself.

One of the most beautiful things you will ever hear a person say is that they are ready to go home into the arms of the Lord. Has that ever happened to you? You can see the peace in their eyes and the relief they feel when they say that, because they are completely resting in what Jesus has done for them. Do you have that confidence? Simeon says you can. You can have it when Jesus is your trust.

What Simeon said and did that day in the temple was so meaningful that it has passed into song. It's a song that the church still sings, on occasion. It's typically sung after we have been at the Lord's Table; after we have held Jesus there; that's when we sing: "Lord now lettest thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word, for my eyes have seen Thy salvation which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people, a light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of Thy people Israel." We are just like Simeon. That's why we sing his song. With your heart you see Jesus in this eating and drinking. You can depart this Table in peace and face anything because Jesus is yours.