

The Messiah's Birth Delivered True Peace

Pastor Chris Baker // 12.23.18 // Centralia FBC

Intro

Socks and underwear.

Perhaps, there is no more practical gift you can give a loved one this Christmas. Two items that—I sincerely hope—all of us use. And according to a news story I read this week¹ socks and underwear are the Christmas gift that people *least* want to receive. So if you don't want to disappoint your loved ones this Christmas, maybe think of a different gift to give. You still have about 36 hours or so finish shopping (or start shopping). But if you've already got socks and underwear wrapped and nestled safely under your Christmas tree, all is not lost.

I mean, disappointment really isn't all that uncommon around Christmastime. This time of year brings a lot of joy, but also a lot of pressure, right parents? You've got to pick out just the perfect gift, which means you have a plan. You have to know what your kids like and what they don't like and the right colors and there's always a new Christmas fad or hot toy that's difficult to get your hands on. And even in the years where you nail it. . . years where you not only buy the right stuff in the right colors in the right sizes and you even find it on sale, you know, the mythical year when everything falls into place just the way you would have scripted it. . . there's a magical moment when your kid opens their perfectly selected, gift, loves it for 10 minutes, and then ends up playing with the box. So they're not disappointed but you are!

We make such a big deal out of the things on the periphery of Christmas that the risk of frustration and disappointment is very real. One psychologist in the United Kingdom wrote that:

Capitalism drives Christmas on to being bigger and better and happier and more exciting than ever before. . . Christmas confronts us with the disappointment of life as it is compared with life as we remember it and life as we see it portrayed in the jingling, jangling adverts.² - Nick Luxmoore, *Psychology Today*

Here's my pastoral concern at Christmas: While we sing about the baby Jesus sleeping in heavenly peace, we do so moving from event to event at a hellish pace. In the midst of the good, we forget that the moment in time we are celebrating is when God broke into human history to secure our everlasting peace once-and-for-all.

The Christmas parties, and school musicals, and family gatherings and gift exchanges aren't bad. But if we exhaust our energies in those things and we set our hopes on the material gifts of Christmas we run the risk of missing out on the greatest gift of all.

¹ <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3970308/No-socks-undies-five-gifts-NO-ONE-wants-Christmas-avoid-getting-giving-boring-present-year.html>

² <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/young-people-close/201112/shock-horror-another-disappointing-christmas>

We're going to spend our time together this morning examining one of the more obscure figures of the Christmas story. A man named Simeon, who said the following words upon seeing our infant Messiah:

*Now, Master,
you can dismiss your servant in peace, as you promised.*

When Jesus Christ was born to a virgin mother He brought with Him a promise of peace for those who belong to Him. That's a promise that remains true today and it's a promise that, if you call Him your Savior, will never leave you disappointed. Simeon's story teaches us that we've been freed from anxiety to live in peace because we are experiencing the salvation bought by the blood of Jesus Christ.

Let's read Simeon's story together, beginning in Luke 2:25

25 There was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. This man was righteous and devout, looking forward to Israel's consolation, and the Holy Spirit was on him. 26 It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he saw the Lord's Messiah. 27 Guided by the Spirit, he entered the temple. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to perform for him what was customary under the law, 28 Simeon took him up in his arms, praised God, and said,

29 Now, Master,
you can dismiss your servant in peace,
as you promised.
30 For my eyes have seen your salvation.
31 You have prepared it
in the presence of all peoples—
32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles
and glory to your people Israel.

33 His father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. 34 Then Simeon blessed them and told his mother Mary: "Indeed, this child is destined to cause the fall and rise of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be opposed— 35 and a sword will pierce your own soul—that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

This is the Word of the Lord. May His Spirit bring its truth to light in our lives today. Let's pray.

I have one simple hope for this morning. It's that we leave here convinced of this truth: *The Messiah's Birth Delivered True Peace.*

Simeon was convinced of that truth and I hope we can be convinced of it not just this Christmas, but as a way we live life. The New Testament idea of peace doesn't just mean the absence of war or absence of conflict or turmoil. It means much more than that. The Greek verb carries the idea of bringing together something that has been separated.

Missionary and Bible translator, Jim Walton, had an experience that I think can teach us much about this Biblical idea of peace.

Walton was translating the New Testament for a tribal group in the jungles of Colombia. But he was having trouble with the word peace. He recorded that:

'During this time, Fernando, the village chief, was promised a 20-minute plane ride to a location that would have taken him 3 days to travel by walking. The plane was delayed in arriving, so Fernando departed on foot. When the plane finally came, a runner took off to bring Fernando back. But by the time he had returned, the plane had left.

Fernando was livid because of the mix-up. He went to Jim and launched into an angry tirade; much of which Jim couldn't even understand.

Fortunately, he taped the chief's diatribe. When he later translated it, he discovered that the chief kept repeating the phrase, "I don't have one heart." Jim asked other villagers what having "one heart" meant, and he found that it was like saying, "There is nothing between you and the other person." That, Walton realized, was just what he needed to translate the word peace.

To have peace with God means that there is nothing—no sin, no guilt, no condemnation—that separates us. And that peace with God is possible only through Christ.³

Romans 5:1 tells us that **Therefore, since we have been declared righteous by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.**

And it's only because of that declaration of righteousness that we can experience true peace. If you find lack of peace in your life as a consistent theme then the teaching of the Bible would indicate you may be unsettled because you lack this peace-generating relationship with God that is only possible through faith.

Simeon had that kind of relationship with God. Luke makes that clear with a very concise description of him in verse 25.⁴

Simeon's Scriptural biography is brief, but it's profound. Here's everything we know about Simeon in bullet point form:

- 1. His name: Simeon**
- 2. His location: Jerusalem**
- 3. Righteous**
- 4. Devout**
- 5. Looking forward to Israel's consolation**
- 6. Holy Spirit was on him**

Those last four things are an amazing biography. If those things can be said about us when we leave this earth we've been successful. We know nothing else about the man either before or after this short episode when Jesus was but 40 days old.

³ <https://odb.org/1996/10/31/one-heart/>

⁴ In the original language the first word of verse 25 is, behold! Luke wants us to pause and note that something important is happening. For reasons that I don't understand, behold didn't make it into most of our modern translations but I do think the modern text still conveys a sense of urgency in this passage.

Yet, while we know little, what we do know about Simeon can tell us a great deal about the goodness of our God and the peace He offers to His children.

To experience that peace, we must be righteous. Now, if you grew up like me you might only know the word 'righteous' as an expression that Ninja Turtle Michelangelo often used to refer to pizza. I think Bill & Ted used it a few times as well. But as disciples of Jesus Christ it's a word we need to be intimately acquainted with outside of dated 80s and 90s pop culture.

For our purpose today we are going to define righteousness as **right standing in the sight of God**. It means that Simeon was justified. The biggest problem in Simeon's life had already been solved. What was it? His sin had separated him from God. Not only that but his sin had earned the wrath of this Holy God—because justice is in His nature so He must punish sin. Luke declares here that Simeon is justified in the sight of God. If you look back at 1:6 he made the same statement about Zechariah and Elizabeth.

There's a good question for us who live on this side of the cross to ask as we examine these to whom the cross was still in their future: how were they saved—justified— if Jesus hadn't yet been resurrected? Luke calls these three righteous, meaning they are right in the sight of the Lord. How can that be so? How were they saved?

Well, Scripture teaches us they were saved the same way we are saved: by grace alone through faith alone.

Ephesians 2 tells us that **8 For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift— 9 not from works, so that no one can boast.**

We are saved by placing our trust in God, acknowledging that we cannot save ourselves and we are fully dependent upon God for our salvation. We see that salvation has come through Jesus Christ, but we are saved by faith gifted to us through the Holy Spirit in the same way God saved Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Simeon—here in Luke 2. Paul breaks this down for us in more detail in Galatians 3:

3 You foolish Galatians! Who has cast a spell on you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified?—He's saying Hey, what happened? Your faith was strong and now you've strayed. How'd that happen? Look at verse 2 I only want to learn this from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law or by believing what you heard?—How were you saved? By something you did or by the Spirit? What did you contribute to your own salvation? That answer can only be nothing. Paul continues— 3 Are you so foolish? After beginning by the Spirit, are you now finishing by the flesh? 4 Did you experience so much for nothing—if in fact it was for nothing? 5 So then, does God give you the Spirit and work miracles among you by your doing the works of the law? Or is it by believing what you heard— 6 just like Abraham who believed God, and it was credited to him for righteousness?—How was Abraham saved? By what he did or by his faith? Paul says here it was by his faith and the writer of Hebrews agrees. Paul goes on in verse 7 to show us how all who are saved are saved in the same way—7 You know, then, that those who have faith, these are Abraham's sons. 8 Now the Scripture saw in advance that God would justify the Gentiles by faith and proclaimed the gospel ahead of time to Abraham, saying, All the nations will be blessed through you. 9 Consequently those who have faith are blessed with Abraham, who had faith.

How are we made righteous? Through faith. Where does faith come from? The Holy Spirit. Do you want to know true and lasting peace? The only way to do that is to have peace with God. Don't miss out on how radical that is. God grants us a peace treaty when we deserve total annihilation.

God has all the power and He's in the position to—and would even be justified in—pouring out his wrath on us for our sin. And yet he gifts us an offer of peace through His Holy Spirit before we've done anything to deserve it.

During the Civil War, General Ulysses S. Grant and his Union army led a siege of Ft. Donelson on the Cumberland River in Middle Tennessee. Grant's troops surrounded the fort and—despite a few breakout attempts—it was clear that his forces were too strong for the 12,000 rebels inside. Their commander, Simon Bolivar Buckner, sent Grant a note asking him for a truce and terms of surrender.

Grant responded with a note that has fortunately been preserved over time. He wrote:

Sir: Yours of this date proposing Armistice, and appointment of Commissioners, to settle terms of Capitulation is just received. No terms except unconditional and immediate surrender can be accepted.

I propose to move immediately upon your works.

I am Sir: very respectfully

Your obt. sevt.

U.S. Grant

Brig. Gen.

Grant was in a position of power and demanded unconditional surrender. God was in a position of infinitely more power approached us with an offer of peace—do you realize how incredible that is!?

You say, well, that's true but doesn't it depend on our response? We have to choose to accept him. And you know what, to a degree there's some truth there. I do believe God has allowed us the autonomy to choose. But the problem is we never choose him.

Jeremiah tells us our own hearts steer us away from God: ***The heart is more deceitful than anything else, and incurable—who can understand it? (Jeremiah 17:9)***

And Paul tells us in Romans 3 that **There is no one righteous, not even one. There is no one righteous, not even one.**

So how is Simeon righteous? Do Paul and Luke disagree? No. Simeon is made righteous based on the gift of faith through the Holy Spirit, just like you and I if we belong to Jesus. On our own, we earn wrath and separation. God gifts us grace and righteousness. What's the proper repose to that?

We can actually learn that from Simeon. Luke tells us he's righteous and he also tells us he's devout. That word literally means 'to take hold of.' Simeon understood what the faith God had gifted him meant for his life—both his eternity and his day-to-day existence.

Faith in God permeates everything you. It has implications for the way you work, the way you eat, the way you sleep, the way you get up in the morning, the media you consume, the way you treat your boss, your co-workers, or your employees. It dictates how you treat your spouse, how you raise your kids, how you spend your time and your money. Faith in God changes all those things. And they change because your heart changes. Works don't save you and they don't keep you saved, but the Bible teaches we were created *for* good works. In Christ we are a new creation and we've been created to carry out His mission—the very thing He's guiding us to do. God's purpose in the world redefines our purpose in life.

Simeon understood that because he devoted his life to looking forward to God's purpose on earth. The end of verse 25 tells us he was looking forward to Israel's consolation—that word there means comfort. It's the same word Paul uses in 2 Corinthians 1:3—*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort*. The God of all comfort is the God who provided the consolation of Israel by restoring them to Himself.

God, by His Holy Spirit, guided Simeon to the only source of true comfort, the only source of true and lasting peace that has ever come into the universe. He found that consolation in the child brought to the temple by Joseph and Mary that day. Israel had been waiting for that comfort for hundreds and hundreds of years. They had been awaiting the king who would provide their rescue and Luke makes it very clear to us that Jesus is this king who came to fulfill the law. From 2:21-38 Luke mentions the law five separate times.

He's conveying an idea here that Jesus came as the fulfillment of the law. Israel was looking for a warrior king. A king who would provide physical rescue from the oppressive thumb of the Roman government. But Luke, in showing us that Jesus is the fulfillment of the law, paints Jesus as a different kind of king. The kind of king Israel really needed.

Rome was a problem for Israel, but not their biggest problem. Their biggest problem was their own sin. The purpose of the law was to reveal that sin to people. It set the standard for Israel. If you compare your life to mine, you may come out looking really good. But the law was the perfect standard of righteousness and that's what God requires to be in relationship with Him, because He's holy. The problem is that no man could live up to that standard. The law was meant to reveal our need for a savior. And so Luke reiterates over and over again that Jesus came under that law in His birth and will go on to fulfill that law with His life.

God's Holy Spirit guided Simeon to see salvation in the person of a 40-day old child brought to the temple under the authority of the Old Covenant. God spoke through Simeon as he foreshadows the outcome of this baby's life in verses 30-32. Let's read them again:

30 For my eyes have seen your salvation.
31 You have prepared it
in the presence of all peoples—
32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles
and glory to your people Israel.

That's the great commission, isn't it? Through Jesus Christ, in his humblest form, helpless, fully dependent on His earthly parents in this moment, God will rescue for Himself a people from every tribe, tongue, and nation—Gentiles and Jews alike. And then Simeon goes on to say something a little more ominous:

33 His father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. 34 Then Simeon blessed them and told his mother Mary: "Indeed, this child is destined to cause the fall and rise of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be opposed— 35 and a sword will pierce your own soul—that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

This child is destined to cause the fall and rise of many. That's such a simple truth, yet when you really allow its full meaning to blossom in your mind it evokes a wide range of emotions. The name Jesus Christ brings great joy to those who belong to Him, but remains a stumbling block and even a dreadful sound to those who don't know Him.

Simeon looked on Jesus and saw salvation, and it brought peace—ultimately. Even if you deeply love Jesus there will be times when that love brings about much turmoil and it should. Simeon looked at Mary and said her son was a sword that would pierce her own soul. That's not something you say to someone's baby, is it?

Simeon was pointing to Mary's anguish at the sacrifice Jesus would become in just a few short decades, but there's an even deeper meaning here. If you look to Jesus for salvation you will find yourself pierced. John MacArthur put it well when he said:

He engendered hostility. And what came to the surface was bitterness and anger and hatred and venom and death because when the Messiah comes His holiness confronts wickedness . . . To be saved by Jesus, to enter into Jesus' kingdom, your sin has to be exposed. If you acknowledge that and embrace that exposure and come to Him for forgiveness, you'll be saved and enter His kingdom. If you hate that exposure and resent Jesus for doing it, you'll go to hell in your sins. So, His life was a revelation. How people responded reveals the condition of their heart.⁵

Indeed, Jesus is destined to cause the rise and fall of many. If you lack peace, it could be because you lack a relationship with the one who brings peace.

Simeon was righteous, devout, and guided by the Holy Spirit. That guidance led him to see the very face of God. Whether you get socks and underwear this Christmas or whether you get nothing at all, if you're here and you're a Christian you've got something to celebrate this Christmas. You've been gifted faith by a Holy Spirit that has made you righteous, empowered you to be devout and will guide you to see the very face of God—just like Simeon.

This man's words are prophecy, the very words of God Himself. What He said is true: Jesus Christ will be the turning point for you. Either He'll cause you to rise or because you've rejected Him you'll fall. Think about all those who encountered Him who missed it. Some very close to Him.

Our world changes each year because of the birth of Christ. Sure, the world has worked to cloud the joy of Christmas with gadgets and toys and gifts and trees and Santa Clause and yard decorations. None of those things are bad. But don't let the buzz of Christmas distract you from the point—the Messiah, the savior of the world, has come. And He has won for us a lasting and eternal peace. Christ fought and won peace on our behalf. Have you taken hold of that peace this Christmas? Let's pray.

⁵ <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/42-30/testifying-to-jesus-simeon-part-2>