

# The Nunc Dimittis - Simeon's Song

## Luke 2:22-35

(Expanded Sermon Notes)



In our journey through the songs of Advent in Luke's Gospel, we have seen God use the regular, ordinary, and even unlikely in his plan of redemption. In our first week, we met Mary, the mother of Jesus. A teenager betrothed to Joseph, who courageously responds in praise to God's plan to include her as the mother of the Savior. In our second week, we met Zechariah, who was a priest and the father of John the Baptist. John would be the first prophet in 400 years, and he would declare that the Messiah had arrived. The third week had us meeting the Angelic host that sang a song of praise of God's glory to a group of lowly shepherds in a field outside of Bethlehem. God's inclusion of the shepherds is both striking and encouraging. It continues the thread of God using the lowly and the humble to advance his plans of redemption.

The fourth and final "song of Advent" in Luke's Gospel comes from a man who had made his way to the Temple day after day, waiting to see the Lord's salvation. His name is Simeon. By most accounts, he was an older man who was not formally trained as a priest, but instead was a faithful layman. Simeon had heard from God (by his Spirit) that he wouldn't die until he saw the Messiah with his own eyes. How amazing that promise must have been for Simeon! Generations of faithful Israelites had waited and longed for 400+ years to see the promised Messiah, but many would never lay their eyes on the Messiah. Yet, here is Simeon, and God told him at some point in his life that he would get this amazing honor. Yet, I wonder how many days he went to the Temple and came back without seeing the Messiah... hundreds.... thousands? I can barely wait for same-day delivery or in the drive-thru line for a cup of coffee, and here was Simeon, regularly and faithfully going to the Temple and trusting God for a promise that he had not yet seen. His faith is striking and remarkable, but his habits are nothing short of ordinary. Luke doesn't tell us anything except that he went to the Temple, and we can assume he did the normal Temple things. No magical practices or heroic spiritual feats to usher in the Messiah. Just regular and ordinary faithfulness. Sounds boring, right? For me, it would be. For Simeon, though, it built increasing expectancy, thankfulness, and gratitude. His example teaches us a powerful lesson: **ordinary faithfulness builds thankfulness and gratitude**. See, we live in a fast-paced world that is on to the next and bigger thing before the previous thing even has a chance to run its course. In this world, ordinary faithfulness and regular devotion can be confused for apathy or complacency. But, thankfully, Simeon shows us a different picture. Let's look at his story.

# 1. Regular Devotion

- a. What does the text tell us about Simeon?
- i. **Righteous** – Outward actions – The way he lived his life.
    1. To be declared righteous in the scope of the Bible is a legal designation. It literally means “to be found having acted rightly.” Often, we think of it as an intellectual concept, right belief. However, in the Jewish tradition, you needed both right thought and right action to be declared righteous.
    2. The concepts of justice and righteousness are prominent in the OT for describing both divine and human activity. So it is not surprising that the Gospels draw upon them to narrate Jesus’ life and teachings. Although these concepts are evident beyond the use of particular terms, justice is often expressed by the words *krisis* and *dikaio-synē* (and *ekdikeō* in Luke). The concept of righteousness is typically communicated with some form of the *dikaio-* root (adjective *dikaio-s*; noun *dikaio-synē*). Given that justice and righteousness emerge most prominently in Jesus’ teachings in the Synoptics, Matthew and Luke feature the themes more than Mark and John do (e.g., *dikaio-s/ynē*: Matthew 24x; Luke 12x; Mark 2x; Jn 5x).<sup>1</sup>
    3. Justice (*dikaio-synē*) is an important concept in Greco-Roman philosophical discourse. In *The Republic* Plato refers to *dikaio-synē* as the cornerstone of the city-state. Justice, in turn, consists of three foundational virtues: self-control, courage, and wisdom. Aristotle, Plato’s student, understands justice (*dikaio-synē*) as both a general virtue and the specific virtue of fairness or equity (e.g., *Eth. nic.* 5.1)<sup>2</sup>
  - ii. **Devoted** – Inner life. I.e., God-fearing. – The way he loved God.
    1. Echoes of Deut. 6:-4-6 – Loving God with your whole heart.
    2. <sup>4</sup> “**Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.** <sup>5</sup> **You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.** <sup>6</sup> **And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.**”
    3. The word that Luke uses is: *eulabēs*, **εὐλαβής**, *ές*, (*λαβεῖν*) *taking hold well, holding fast, clinging*, metaph., *πενία* Luc.Tim.20: lit. in Adv. *εὐλαβῶς*, *κατέχειν* Ael.NA3.13, 6.55 (Sup.): but mostly - *undertaking prudently, discreet, cautious* <sup>3</sup>
      - a. This caution is not a hesitancy, but a reference. – Simeon is cautious to not worship anything but God. In other words, he is prudent and active to only prescribe lasting worth to God.
      - b. This devotion (worship) is fleshed out in his actual life as he is declared to be righteous. These two words, devotion and righteous, go together and are inseparable in the Bible’s perspective.
  - iii. **Waiting** – The way he was faithful.
    1. We can pass right over this word, but it is important for us to pause and consider.

<sup>1</sup> J. K. Brown, “Justice, Righteousness,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels, Second Edition*, ed. Joel B. Green, Jeannine K. Brown, and Nicholas Perrin (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 463.

<sup>2</sup> J. K. Brown, “Justice, Righteousness,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels, Second Edition*, ed. Joel B. Green, Jeannine K. Brown, and Nicholas Perrin (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 463.

<sup>3</sup> Henry George Liddell et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 720.

2. We don't know the details of Simeon's life. All we know is what Luke tells us. We can take some guesses though. He was probably not a young man since he has been "waiting." The implication in Luke's grammar is that "it has been a while." Most scholars think that he was a layman, but we have one non-biblical account that says he was a priest. Whether he was young or old, a priest or a layman, really doesn't matter. What matters is what he declares and what his example of waiting teaches us.
  3. **The hallmark of his spiritual condition is his deep hope, "waiting for the consolation [*paraklēsis*] of Israel."** The restoration of the nation and the defeat of her enemies is a feature of Isaiah (40:1; 49:13; 51:3; 61:2; 66:13). This consolation was to be accomplished by the Servant of Yahweh (Isa 52–53), and it would not take place until the Messiah arrived and instituted the messianic age. So Simeon was especially waiting for the Christ child to appear and thought that day had now arrived.<sup>4</sup>
- b. Key reminder – **God prepares us for the extraordinary through the events and rhythms of the ordinary. → Discipline vs Zeal...**
- i. **Zeal: great energy or enthusiasm in pursuit of a cause or an objective**
  - ii. **Discipline: train oneself to do something in a controlled and habitual way**
    1. Zeal is important, but we should more greatly desire to be a people of discipline. Specifically, the discipline of discipleship.
      - a. **"We must not be led to believe that the disciplines are only for spiritual giants and hence beyond our reach, or only for contemplatives who devote all their time to prayer. God intends the Disciplines of the spiritual life to be for ordinary human beings: people who have jobs, who care for children, who wash dishes and mow lawns."** – Richard Foster<sup>5</sup>
      - b. **"In one important sense, the spiritual disciplines are not hard. We need not be well advanced in matters of theology to practice the disciplines."**<sup>6</sup>
        - i. In another way, they are hard because they go against our sinful nature.
  - iii. **As people of discipline and discipleship, we commit to a life of incremental growth and victory.**
  - iv. **Picture your spiritual life like a thermostat.** - As the temperature goes up, it doesn't go up by 5 or 10 degrees at a time, but by one degree.
    1. Can you imagine if you could only change the temperature in your home by units of 5 or 10?
  - v. **Too often, we think our spiritual lives should be like that, where we can move them up in temperature by units of 5 or 10.**
    1. I.e., That we can go from *not much* to *great* in a short amount of time.
    2. This is not true. And, we know that in every other area of our lives.
  - vi. **We should have a greater desire to see incremental growth instead of instantaneous transformation.**

<sup>4</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *Luke: Verse by Verse*, ed. Jeffrey Reimer, Elliot Ritzema, and Danielle Thevenaz, Awa Sarah, Osborne New Testament Commentaries (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018), 74.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Foster, *The Celebration of Discipline*, p.1

<sup>6</sup> Richard Foster, *The Celebration of Discipline*, p.2

- vii. So often we want to see God in really big ways. And, we believe in a God who moves in big ways and does big things! The very reality of Simeon's song is the fulfillment of the Messianic promise. This is a really big moment! But God prepared Simeon for this moment over decades of regular and ordinary faithfulness.
  - 1. We're going to come back to the idea of purposeful waiting. But now, let's look at the extraordinary thing that God shows Simeon because of his regular, ordinary, and even boring faithfulness.

## 2. Seeing Salvation

### a. The Holy Spirit leads Simeon.

- i. Ok, so while we are reading this account in what we call the New Testament, Simeon's only reference point is the Old Testament. Of course, he wouldn't have called it that. He would have called it the Scriptures. **In the Old Testament period, the Holy Spirit primarily worked in people by equipping them for specific tasks.** It isn't until Pentecost when the Spirit descends on the disciples and the church age begins, that we experience the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in every believer.
  - 1. The Holy Spirit had revealed to him at some point in the past what he would witness in his lifetime. Then, the Holy Spirit not only led him to the Temple that day, but revealed Jesus to him as Joseph and Mary walked into the Temple like any other set of parents.
  - 2. As the sacred couple proceed through the court of the Gentiles into the court of women (Mary could go no further), they are intercepted by a very excited man with a prophetic air about him. He is probably not a priest, but he performs a priestly act as he takes the baby in his arms and pours out his thanks and praise to God on his behalf. The parents are doing so much more than just presenting their child to God. They are initiating a messianic sequence that will mean the restoration of Israel, indeed of all humanity.<sup>7</sup>
- ii. **He was a Spirit-filled prophet. "The Holy Spirit was on him" is probably a general statement, but the inspiration of the Spirit relates entirely to the significance of this child being presented to the Lord.** This is the subject of 2:26–27. First the Spirit had "revealed" to him that "he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah," the one who would indeed restore Israel. This promise had come sometime in the past and had defined his life, making possible his going home to be with the Lord.<sup>8</sup>
- iii. **Because Simeon in his regular faithfulness cultivated a sensitivity to God's leading...**
  - 1. **Simeon is dependent on God.**
    - a. How many days does he go to the Temple looking for the Messiah and came home with nothing? Yet, he keeps going back.
  - 2. **Simeon is looking for God.**
    - a. Everyday that he returns is actively looking because of what he remembers about God.
  - 3. **Simeon responds to God.**

<sup>7</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *Luke: Verse by Verse*, ed. Jeffrey Reimer, Elliot Ritzema, and Danielle Thevenaz, Awa Sarah, Osborne New Testament Commentaries (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018), 75.

<sup>8</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *Luke: Verse by Verse*, ed. Jeffrey Reimer, Elliot Ritzema, and Danielle Thevenaz, Awa Sarah, Osborne New Testament Commentaries (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018), 74.

- a. How many times do you think he went home without seeing the Messiah, but still talked about what God was doing? We get a glimpse into one moment of his life, but we can safely assume that he had cultivated a regular pattern of looking for God and responding to God.
- b. **Is the Spirit flowing through me?** (*Spiritual dependence, listening to God, being led by God, spiritual sensitivities, obedience, gathering*) – Here is how we know that the Spirit is flowing through you and me.
  - i. I know the character traits of God well enough to distinguish between his voice and other things I hear or think.
  - ii. I devote myself to encountering God through disciplined rhythms of silence, solitude, and reflection (daily, weekly, monthly, annually).
  - iii. I intentionally watch for the movement of God around me so I can join him in what he’s doing.
  - iv. I find myself responding more and more quickly to the Spirit’s promptings throughout my day.
  - v. Those closest to me would say the fruit of the Spirit is increasingly evident in my life.
- c. **There are two key phrases in Simeon’s song that we shouldn’t miss.** They are phrases that declare who Jesus is and what Simeon was looking for and hoping in. This is what Simeon “sees.”
  - i. **“A light for the Gentiles.” – The nations were always part of the plan.**
    1. These universal overtones are the subject of the third couplet (2:32), which expands the meaning of “prepared [for] all nations.” This messianic salvation (2:30) will bring the disparate nations that are now in enmity against each other together, in particular the Gentiles and the Jews. God’s salvation is the one antidote to racial prejudice that will work. This, in fact, is a major theme in Isaiah, the universal effects of God’s salvation on all the nations of earth, as the Messiah is to bring about (and Israel participate in) “a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth” (Isa 49:6; see also 42:6; 51:4–5). In Zechariah’s hymn (1:78–79) the Messiah brings God’s new dawn to the nations to shine his light on the darkness of sinful humanity and bring the peace of God.<sup>9</sup>
    2. The reality of the OT is that chose a people set apart for himself not to become a “Holy huddle,” but to be a life preserver and rescue agent to the rest of the world. In fact, if you look at the rhythms of worship that God sets up for the Israelites as they come out of Egypt and into the Promised Land, we see that they are familiar enough to the nations to draw them in, but distinct enough to not be confused for the idolatrous practices of the nations.<sup>10</sup>
  - ii. **“For glory to your people Israel.” – Participate in and declare God’s glory.**
    1. **They were to be his covenant people, who were to be about his covenantal purposes.** We talked about this in the sermon on Zechariah’s song. Now, in Christ, we have become God’s covenantal people and are to be about his covenantal purposes.
    2. This light that illumines the Gentiles is at the same time “the glory of your people Israel.” God’s covenant people will share his glory through the coming of the

<sup>9</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *Luke: Verse by Verse*, ed. Jeffrey Reimer, Elliot Ritzema, and Danielle Thevenaz, Awa Sarah, Osborne New Testament Commentaries (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018), 76.

<sup>10</sup> For more on this see – Ray Vander Laan’s work on the Exodus - <https://www.thatttheworldmayknow.com/>

Messiah. Here is truly the “consolation of Israel” that was the focus of Simeon’s hope (2:25). From the very time of the Abrahamic covenant, Israel was meant to be the channel of God’s blessing to the nations (Gen 12:2–3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14). **So Israel was not only meant to share God’s glory but also to be the means by which it was shared with the nations.**<sup>11</sup>

### 3. Purposeful Waiting

- a. What does it mean to be purposeful in waiting?
  - i. Remember - **God prepares us for the extraordinary through the events and rhythms of the ordinary.**
    - 1. In Siemon and Anna’s (keep reading) examples we see profound regularity in their lives and worship. They keep doing the same God-honoring things over and over again. Luke doesn’t give us the full subtext of their minds and their hearts, instead he gives us a “strand of straw in a fencepost moment.” This is an expression to talk about the power of a tornado. You can show a picture of the path of damage or you can show a piece of straw in a fencepost. Both are equally powerful, and Luke gives us the latter in this passage.
    - 2. We have to remember and be aware that Simeon (and Anna) didn’t just happen upon this magnificent moment. They were preparing for it in their waiting and anticipation of God’s fulfilled promises.
  - ii. We also come to see a powerful lesson in their examples – Waiting (on the Lord) isn’t a passive discipline. Simeon and Anna were about the Lord’s business as they waited on this very specific moment. Sometimes we think of waiting on the Lord as if we are in the waiting room at the dentist’s office. What can you do that is truly purposeful as you sit there waiting for your name to be called? Not much, right? So, what do you do? Watch whatever home remodeling reality TV show is on, or thumb through some random magazine that you’d never buy. Unfortunately, when we take that approach in our spiritual lives, not only do we miss God, but we cultivate rhythms of life that aren’t focused on God. If we want to be purposefully responsive in our waiting, here are three steps to take and questions to ask.
- b. **What rhythms am I cultivating?**
  - i. **Scripture** – How am I taking in God’s Word? We believe that God’s Word is a gift from God for us to know him and to understand the way that we are to live. If you want to know God and hear his voice, read the Bible with increasing regularity.
    - 1. Memorize – Create a regular practice of memorizing a bible verse every month.
    - 2. Listen to the Bible via your Bible app on your drive in the mornings or on the way home.
    - 3. Start with a simple devo or a daily Bible reading plan. – Miss a day? Don’t stress, just pick up where you left off. Completing the plan isn’t the point, enjoying God is.
  - ii. **Prayer** – Is something that we are to be consistently about. And it doesn’t need to be complicated.
    - 1. Take a 1-minute pause throughout your day to have moments of prayer dispersed through your day.

---

<sup>11</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *Luke: Verse by Verse*, ed. Jeffrey Reimer, Elliot Ritzema, and Danielle Thevenaz, Awa Sarah, Osborne New Testament Commentaries (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018), 76–77.

2. Set regular calendar reminders to pray at specific times of the day.
  3. Find someone that you admire, and ask them to help you grow in your comfort with prayer.
- iii. **Rest** – Sometimes this is called the discipline of Sabbath. You will certainly find that word in the Bible. That word can feel very monastic or ancient, that is why we like to talk about it as taking intentional rest.
1. **What and how do you take time from your doing to just be with God, with his people, and just enjoy his presence?**
  2. See, the point (and gift) of intentional rest is to be reminded that we are not defined or saved by what we do and accomplish. We are saved and defined by God's grace.
- c. **Whom am I becoming?**
- i. This is a very reflective and evaluative question. Sometimes I hear that we can't "measure the Christian life." And I understand that sentiment, in that, we are not to become legalistic or confused to think that we can manufacture what only God can do. However, you cannot read the New Testament and come away with the idea that spiritual growth is not definable, demonstrable, or measurable. We are to increase in Christlikeness, and therefore we should be able to see the increase... which is a measurement.
  - ii. **More like Christ or the world?**
    1. If you are wondering how to measure this question, simply read Gal. 5:19-24 and ask yourself these two questions.
      - a. What is more evident in my life, the fruit of the flesh or the fruit of the Spirit?
      - b. How can I cooperate with God to increase in the fruit of the Spirit?
- d. **What is my life's mission?**
- i. God's glory or my own? – The more that we cultivate purposeful and intentional rhythms and practices of knowing and hearing from God, the more the mission of our lives will be recalibrated to be about God's mission everywhere that we go.
  - ii. **With the new year coming up, consider drafting a personal mission statement.**  
**Something like:**
    1. I exist to know God, enjoy his presence, and glorify him in word and deed everywhere that I go.
    2. I exist to love God by loving my neighbor as myself, and I'll be intentional to respond to God's leading in my relationships.
    3. I exist as a whole-life worshipper of God through regular rhythms of study, prayer, fellowship, and sharing the good news of Jesus.
    4. I exist as a redeemed child of God to be purposefully responsive to his leading and radically generous with my resources each and every day.