

God's Favored Ones Depart in Peace

Luke 2:28-32

TEXT: *Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."*

In Jesus' name, my fellow redeemed:

There is a man I knew who loved the Lord and his church. During the years that I served as his pastor, he always seemed happy and content, even though the Lord had never blessed him and his wife with children. They used their time and energy to serve the Lord and their fellow Christians.

Then things seemed to change. He would leave the worship service with questions about the sermon. He would call me up for an opportunity to discuss things that were troubling his heart. That's when I discovered that he had been suffering from fits of depression and that he had been taking medications for the problem. After a time he would think to himself that a Christian ought not have to rely on medication and that Bible reading and prayer should be his source of strength. That's also when I discovered that he had friends who were Christians of another church body whose theology focused more on the Christian's heart than on the heart of our Lord. He would then set aside his medications and while reading the literature they would give him his conscience troubled him deeply because of his sinful thoughts. When he would talk to me and show me the literature they gave him, I would throw it into the wastebasket and remind him of the love of God through Jesus that assures us of our forgiveness. Forgiveness is for sinners, and that he sensed full well. Jesus died on the cross for our sins. Case closed.

One day I was called to the hospital by his wife who told me he had suddenly been diagnosed with an incurable cancer. He had six months to live. On my way, I asked the Lord for the wisdom and the Word to present to him since I assumed that he would be terribly depressed over the news that his end was near. But when I walked into his room, there sat a man who was all smiles. He said, "Pastor! What a relief it is for me to know that I am about to go to heaven and I even know how the Lord is going to take me!" Instead of depression, there was a powerful and happy peace. He died a happy man.

Now I don't think that I'd like to die like that, but it worked for him. And here is a blessed truth about God's Elect: GOD'S FAVORED ONES DEPART IN PEACE.

Simeon was another case in point. ***Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ.*** Lu 2 We're not told how or when the Holy Spirit had revealed this special favor to Simeon, but Scripture simply tells us that God had promised that he would lay eyes on God's Savior before he would die. Also, we aren't told how old Simeon was when the Lord revealed this to him. We assume that Simeon was an old man, but Scripture doesn't say how old he was. What if he were only in his 30's or 40's? Is that old? Was he middle aged? Was he in his 80's or 90's? No matter, because one day Simeon was led to the temple and there He was! The Christ child! Yes, Simeon's days were numbered like all of us, but now his days were about to

come to an end. For he had seen the Christ of God, held Him in his arms, and God's special favor had been fulfilled.

Let us consider this fact: God has given us the same favor but in a different way. When Simeon held Jesus in his arms he declared: *my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.* What is it that we are now celebrating? Have we not laid our eyes on Jesus in a way that was kept from Simeon? We are there in the private quarters of the virgin Mary as the angel Gabriel makes that glorious announcement of the Savior's birth. We are there in the stable as shepherds and wise men worship Jesus. Our eyes and ears take in the sounds and events of Jesus' suffering under Pontius Pilate and the inhumane crucifixion. We are there with the men and women who peered into the empty tomb on Easter Sunday. The only thing we haven't seen yet is still to come, and that we will see with Job, Simeon, Mary and Joseph and all whose eyes have seen God's salvation which He has prepared in the sight of all people. That will be the glorious return of our Savior on the Last Day.

Through the Gospel in Word and Sacrament, God's Elect, His Favored Ones, are given the power to see the Christ of God and our Salvation. And now having seen the Christ, we can be assured that we too will be given a blessed end.

We're not told how Simeon died, or when he died. We're not told how Joseph or Mary died. Because Joseph is not mentioned during Jesus' ministry or at the cross, it's a safe assumption that he died before Jesus began his ministry at age 30. Who know? And yet, who cares? For we know that all who know and confess Jesus as their Savior go to heaven for eternal life as the Bible says: *You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.* Ps 16 Should we care how we are to leave this world? Since God has assured us of an eternal life, a never-ending existence with an infinite amount of time to enjoy God's presence and to enjoy eternal pleasures at His right hand, which means that He will keep pouring out upon us things that will please our senses forever and ever, shall we not look forward to our departure from this life?

There are two things that we must consider. First of all, while we are still here on this side of heaven, we are surrounded by God's enemies that press us hard day and night. There is Satan and the ungodly who surround us and our children at work and at play. They falsely believe that this world is their kingdom and they love to have us join them in all manner of sin and vice. They love to see you, a Christian, behave as they behave because it makes them feel closer to God. If you, a Christian, curse and commit sexual sins, get angry and abusive, and still believe that you will be saved, then they will certainly be saved, even without Jesus. If they see you despise preaching and the Sacraments, and expect to go to heaven, then what need have they of church and worship? But they are wrong, and shame on us if we do not love them enough to warm them with our words and actions!

Secondly, we still have the Old Adam, the sinful nature, that loves this sinful world with a passion, and would gladly set aside things spiritual for things that are worldly. Even King David fell to lust and adultery and murder, and almost lost his salvation before he repented. Judas Iscariot did lose his faith for his love of money and lost his salvation. Who are we to imagine that we are any stronger in our faith than David or Judas?

So God's Elect do not take God's grace for granted, but we pray the Lord for what Christians often call "a blessed end." And what is "a blessed end?" Is it an easy and convenient death? Not necessarily. It is, in fact, a departure from this life in the one true saving faith. The criminal who was crucified next to Jesus left this life in a gruesome fashion, but with the blessed promise of Jesus Himself ringing in his ears: ***Today you will be with me in paradise!*** That is a blessed end! That is what I want to hear as I close my eyes in death! That is what I want my children and grandchildren to hear as the Lord takes them from this life. That is what I want each and every one of you to hear as our eyelids close in death! And I know that is what all of you want to hear too.

There is one more blessed promise that the Holy Spirit has written down for us. I have witnessed the fulfillment of this promise in the lives of many Christians during my ministry. It is written: ***Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"*** He 13 The man of whom I spoke earlier was one of many in whose dying days this promise was fulfilled. God gives us the comfort peace and the strength to be like Simeon who said with joy: ***Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people...***

God has promised you a departure that is tailored for your departure, and rest assured that it will be a blessing. Amen