

Title: The Promise - Hope
Date: November 28, 2021
Subject: Simeon shows that we find hope in the Christ of Christmas.
Scripture: Luke 2:25–35; Isaiah 9:2; 1 Peter 1:13

Tim Tebow is an unashamed follower of Jesus. He demonstrated this during his college football career when he regularly spoke about his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He's recognized as one of the greatest college players ever. He helped lead the Florida Gators to the National Championship when he was a freshman. He won the Heisman Trophy given to the best player when he was only a sophomore.

The team had high hopes his junior season but they were crushed when, as the No. 4 ranked team, they were upset by an unranked team they were favored to beat easily. After the game, Tebow politely answered a few questions from the media. Then, full of emotion, he delivered what has been immortalized as The Promise: "I just want to say one thing to the fans and everybody in Gator Nation, I'm sorry, extremely sorry. We were hoping for an undefeated season. That was my goal, something Florida's never done here. But I promise you one thing, a lot of good will come out of this. You will never see any player in the entire country play as hard as I will play the rest of the season, and you will never see someone push the rest of the team as hard as I will push everybody the rest of the season, and you will never see a team play harder than we will the rest of the season. God bless."

Then he walked off the platform... and into the pages of history as he led his team to dominating victories all the way to winning the National Championship. He carried through on his promise to play hard and lead his team. The promise would have been fulfilled even if they hadn't won the title.

We make promises. Sometimes we carry through. Other times, not so much. God is different. When he makes a promise, he keeps it. We can be confident of that. The promise we celebrate extensively at Christmas is his promise of sending a Savior. Our sermon series this Christmas focuses on the overall promise as seen in Christ and then in the gifts he brings - hope, peace, joy, love and life. We'll look at people who were among the first to see the fulfillment of the Lord's incredible promise.

We begin with Simeon who shows how we can look to God for hope. Many people look for hope in their 401K, a friend, the government... Where do we find our hope? Is our hope based on something we want God to do or is it based in God Himself?

Scripture's understanding of the word *hope* isn't wishful thinking based on vague optimism. It's confidence in what God has promised and the expectation he will do it.

Simeon enters the Christmas story 40 days after Jesus was born. Mary and Joseph had previously taken Jesus to the temple to have him circumcised. They returned for the ceremonial purification of Mary and to present Jesus to be consecrated and dedicated to God. Simeon's story is told in Luke 2, the passage read earlier.

I. The Christ of Christmas reveals God's nature

A. God is sovereign

Simeon addresses God as sovereign. He recognizes God is in control, the One who is able to accomplish all he desires to accomplish. Simeon also calls him Lord which means master and ruler. He is supreme and absolute ruler over creation, all nations and all people. God answers to no one.

Based on who he is, there are truths which can be affirmed.

B. God is a promise keeper

Simeon had been waiting for the consolation of Israel. He was looking for the coming of the Messiah/Christ who would bring comfort by rescuing his people. This Anointed One would be the Comforter and Rescuer.

Simeon likely was steeped in the Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah. He would have pored over these Scriptures looking to see if he had missed some clue, to see if he could find more about when the Christ would come. He'd go back again and again and again to Isaiah's prophecies: "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: the virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel...The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the shadow of death a light has dawned...For to us a Child is born, to us a Son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end... A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him" (Isaiah 7:14; 9:2, 6, 7; 11:1, 2). These prophecies of the Christ who was to come were Simeon's bread and butter. They filled him with anticipation as he waited and waited for God to act. He longed for God to act.

Then the day arrived when it all came together. Simeon was in the temple waiting for God's promise to be revealed. Mary and Joseph brought the young child. Their paths crossed. It wasn't a coincidence. It was a God ordained moment. Simeon instantly recognized the child as the fulfillment of the promises, all the promises God had made. God made good on his promise.

II. The Christ of Christmas is God's salvation

Simeon rejoiced he was seeing the salvation God was offering. The Son of God didn't come into the world and take on a human body so we could have our attitudes adjusted. God knows we need them but that's not why he came. He didn't come to provide a better social atmosphere, though that certainly should happen when people place their trust in Christ. He didn't come so we could reach our best selves, our potential as people. Jesus came because we were totally and irreversibly depraved and without hope in this world. He came to bring salvation. He came to be Salvation.

The offer of salvation was extended to Simeon, to his people the Jews, and to those who aren't Jews - the Gentiles. All people are included in God's promise. The inclusion of the Gentiles forms a significant part of the prophecies. They refer to a place known as the "Galilee of the Gentiles" (Isaiah 9:1, 2). It was the upper portion of Galilee with cities like Tyre and Sidon and people groups like the Phoenicians. It was a predominantly

Gentile region. Jesus began his preaching ministries in this area. We're told he did this "to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah" (Matthew 4:12 - 16 citing Isaiah 9:1, 2. Cf. Romans 15:8 - 13).

The Messiah would be a light for the Gentiles (Isaiah 9:1, 2, 6, 7; 42:6; 49:6; Malachi 4:2). Simeon was merely picking up on God's theme when he said he'd seen the salvation "prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." The Gospel of John proclaims Jesus Christ as "the true Light that gives light to every man was coming into the world" (John 1:9).

God wasn't acting in the shadows. He wasn't trying to hide what he was doing. He acted very publicly so all could be aware and know. The fleshing out of the rest of the story of salvation would, to quote from John's Gospel: "I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written" (John 21:25).

To put the story briefly - Jesus Christ would experience life as a child and teen, then grow into a mature adult. He experienced all people had to go through. He was tempted in all ways people are. He taught how people could come into a right relationship with the Heavenly Father. He lived a perfect life and then offered that perfect life as a sacrifice to pay for our sins. He came to be the Savior. He was the Savior. He is the Savior.

III. The Christ of Christmas calls all people to decision

Some may have viewed Simeon as an old buzzard. Many assume Simeon was old. Some traditions hold he was 112. That's getting up there. We can't definitively determine his age as Scripture doesn't say. It simply informs us he's been waiting and was told he wouldn't die before he'd see the Lord's Christ. How long was he waiting? We aren't told. However, whether old or relatively young, after seeing the child, he was ready to die.

Some may have thought he was in the way, offbeat and downright fanatical. He wasn't living in the real world because he kept rambling on about old promises about a coming Messiah. It seemed too fantastical. After all, it had been over 400 years since they'd heard something from God through the prophet Malachi.

Others may have revered him because of his age, status or trust in the Lord.

I don't think it mattered to Simeon how people viewed him. He was a person who desired to live in a way that pleased God. He walked with God. Scripture calls him righteous and devout. Somehow God's Holy Spirit had communicated with him he wouldn't die until after he'd seen the Lord's Christ.

And now, when he saw the baby Jesus, "Lord, take me home. I'm ready to go!" He'd met the bringer of salvation, who'd give him life and a future home in heaven. Simeon had made his decision.

Everyone is faced with a decision as pointed out in v. 34. "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel." The Christ child would become a man who would be a stumbling block for people or a stepping-stone. Many people can't get past his claims about himself and his teaching. People dismiss Jesus because he doesn't meet their expectations. They stumble and fall (Isaiah 8:14, 15; 28:16). Jesus spoke about himself being the stone people would reject and trip over (Matthew 21:42 - 44). He also said he'd become the capstone, the cornerstone upon which people could build their lives. When they put their hope in him, they'd be on solid ground, unshakeable ground.

The Christ child would also be a sign spoken against. The prophecies foretold a child would be born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14). Mary was the virgin. Jesus was the child born to her. People familiar with Joseph and Mary knew they weren't married when Mary became pregnant. This became a source of rumors and speculation that would dog them throughout their lives. He was the sign spoken against. There are people today who bad mouth Christianity because of his origin on earth.

The real condition of people will come out. "The thoughts of many hearts would be revealed." Would they respond to Jesus as the Savior, the Messiah/Christ, the Light of the world and place their hope in him? Or would they continue to live in a world of disinformation and place their hope and confidence in themselves or some other belief system that falsely promises to lead them to heaven?

We're responsible for ourselves, for our own decision. We can place our hope in Jesus Christ and what he has accomplished or decide to go our own way to our detriment.

There's also hope for those who need Jesus. God offers his grace to all comers, all who admit their need, want him and take him. They can come as long as they have breath and can make a conscious decision to accept his offer of salvation. God will forgive, cleanse, put sins in the past. We don't need to live under their power.

Hope impacts our approach to life. It enables us to live in the here and now as we look to Christ and the promise he gives for new life and a future with him. It helps us restructure the way we look at the world. It might not be easy. Might be rather tough. Might not go as we'd planned. But it gives us a reason to live.

Simeon warned Mary the sword would pierce her soul too. The word "too" means the one who was only a little child would suffer. . . and his mother would as well. Mary faced trying times -- Jesus rejected in his hometown, people belittled him, his family thought he was crazy, and all of the crucifixion drama.

Can you fathom what it'd be like for her to witness the events of Christ's death? She'd heard the angels proclaim wonderful promises about her son who would be born. She'd welcomed the adoring shepherds and Magi, treasured the memories and pondered the meaning.

At the crucifixion, it probably seemed like all her hopes and dreams came crashing down. But she continued to hope, even if it was a faint ember. She was one of the people who saw Christ on the first Easter morning after he'd risen from the dead and she formed part of the early church.

Simeon spent a lot of time without seeing the hand of God, without seeing the promises being fulfilled. He didn't waver. He put his hope in the God he knew and believed him to be.

Part of a song came to my mind that can help us as we go through difficult periods, doubt, questions and uncertainty. "When you can't see God's hand, trust his heart." We might not have clue as to what the Lord is trying to do, but we can draw near to the One who loves us with unaltering and unfailing love.

Scripture assures us what we have isn't a hope that only makes a difference for this life (1 Corinthians 15:19). It's not the hollow prospects of having a better life now, of having fewer problems and trouble...and that's it. That's nice, but it isn't much of a hope. If hope doesn't go beyond this life, then why bother?

Scripture tells us based upon Christ's coming into the world and suffering we should "prepare our minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed" (1 Peter 1:13). There's the hope of the second coming. Jesus will return to get those who belong to him and take them to the place he's been preparing and has promised to give so they can live forever with him.

Herman and Elizabeth locked the doors of their small-town store and headed home on Christmas Eve 1949. It was 11pm. The last customer had finally picked up their order and they'd sold out of everything except for one unclaimed lay-away package.

The next morning, they and 12 year old son Tom opened gifts, but the celebration lacked the joyful exuberance of when he was younger. The boy had only asked for clothes and a few games. When breakfast was over, Tom went next door to play, Herman mumbled he was going back to sleep and Elizabeth cleaned up from breakfast and opening the presents.

Suddenly, she felt compelled to go on a walk in spite of the wind driven sleet mixed with snow that rattled the windows. She fought the feeling for an hour but finally gave in. She told Herman she was going to the store. He thought she was crazy, but she bundled up and headed out into the storm.

When she arrived, she was stunned to see two small boys huddled by the door. They were poorly dressed - no hats or gloves and shoes that barely fit. One boy's face was wet with tears. The older one said to him, "There she is. I told you she'd come."

Elizabeth exclaimed, "What are you children doing here? You should be home on a day like this!"

"We've been waiting for you. My little brother Jimmy didn't get any Christmas gifts and we want to buy skates. We have \$3. See." It broke Elizabeth's heart to have to tell them they'd sold out of everything, but then she remembered the layaway package. "Wait a minute." She went to get it, praying the skates would be the right size. They were a perfect fit.

When the boys handed over their money, Elizabeth refused. She was rewarded with priceless expressions from two wide-eyed boys who realized she was giving them the skates. "Now take that money and get some gloves! How lucky you were I came."

The older boy replied, "I knew you'd come."

"How?"

"I asked Jesus to send you."

The boy had hope because of Jesus. Our hope is based on God's historical promises. God kept his promises regarding Christ's first coming, life, death and resurrection. God will keep his promises regarding the future coming of Christ. God always keeps His promises, even when He takes longer than we'd like. We can be confident that God hasn't forgotten about us. That gives us hope.

Video by Lauren Daigle