

I Can Now Die Content!

Luke 2:21-40; 1 Peter 2:4-12

Bucket Lists

Got your “bucket list” (things to do before you kick the bucket) finished?

Travel the world? Get married? Had kids? Get to that special anniversary?

Or

100 years old? Grandkids settled and happy?

Or could you die content tomorrow, prepared and pleased to meet your maker?

There is a man happy to die in the Gospel of Luke.

Simeon

As Joseph and Mary bring Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem to fulfill the OT rites of purification (the reference to the sacrifice of “a pair of doves or two young pigeons” tells us they were poor, as they couldn’t afford a lamb) an old man meets them in the temple court as they bring the child to be blessed.

Simeon’s opening words in Latin are “Nunc Dimittis”, “now dismiss” ... so ... “Lord, now dismiss your servant” ... or “I can die happy now, I can die content”.

Why? Because he has seen the Lord’s Christ, or the “Messiah”. He had been told by God that he wouldn’t die until that had happened. We don’t know how long ago the prophecy was given to him, maybe many years.

This was not merely “seeing” God’s Messiah, like - “I have seen the Eiffel Tower and it was fabulous – but what the coming of the Messiah meant

³⁰ For my eyes have seen your **salvation**, ³¹ which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: ³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.”

There is a note of hope and expectation.

In the coming of Christ Simeon has seen the “consolation” of Israel” as God has come to his people in the promised Messiah

Simeon, we are told, was looking for Israel’s consolation” – for Israel to be “consoled”, “comforted, soothed”. In Isaiah we see what the one waited for brings – “comfort, comfort my people”. Simeon is waiting for the one who would bring a transformation to all that was wrong, twisted and distorted from God’s purposes for Israel.

This baby will also do what Israel could not – be a “light for revelation to the Gentiles”. Declaring who God is in truth to those outside Israel. Actually, to us.

What sort of person was Simeon?

Remember the religious environment that Jesus was born into and had to battle in his adult ministry was the one Simeon was living in. Simeon lived around when High Priests like Caiaphas plotted the death of a rabbi that came from country Israel and talked about God’s mercy and forgiveness to prostitutes and tax collectors. That’s got to affect the others under his leadership. Simeon was around when Pharisees rejected anyone who did not meet their high standards of godliness and Sadducees didn’t believe in the resurrection.

Amidst all this how does he live?

He is described as “righteous and devout”. Surrounded by a corrupt priesthood and ungodly leaders, what did he do?

He stayed righteous himself, not succumbing to the temptations of abuse of his position in the hierarchy...

He kept looking forward to what God was doing, trusting in the promises that God had made, personally to him, and more importantly, the promises God had made in his word about Israel and indeed the whole world (a light to the Gentiles as well as to Israel).

Here was a man, along with the elderly Anna mentioned in the passage, with a full resume of life’s experience¹. Together they draw a wonderful picture of hope and expectation of what the messiah will do, what this child will do.

Simeon says

“This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, ³⁵ so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

He will, we are told, impact many, and somewhat ominously for Mary, will also cause her heart grief.

If we move from this semi-private encounter that occurs in the temple courts and read the Gospel accounts of Jesus we see indeed this “sign” that is Jesus is both spoken about, spoken against and he reveals in uncanny ways the thoughts and intents of the human heart – thoughts that are in some cases transformed into repentance, forgiveness and salvation, in other cases revealed as murderous, destructive and ungodly.

Our other reading from 1 Peter 2 picks up this...

⁴ As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him— ⁵ you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house^[a] to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶ For in Scripture it says: “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.”^[b]

Simeon, trusting God’s word and promise over so many years, was not put to shame.

Could you die happy?

Are you looking forward to the final fulfillment of God’s promises in Christ?

Knowing you **know** the Messiah, could you pass from this life content?

Seeing God’s Purposes fulfilled! Could you die joyful?

For Simeon, for us who believe, the future is sorted out.

Paul the apostle said in Phil 1:21 - “to live is Christ, to die is gain”.

I am looking forward to seeing the Messiah in person one day.

¹ Bock, p57

Until then I am happy serving him here. There are many things I am looking forward to doing or seeing in this life, many things at this point that I feel are unfinished. But I could, if God so chose, die content today, *because I know I have "seen God's salvation" in the coming of the Messiah!*

Could you?

Amen

Luke 2:21-40

New International Version (NIV)

21 On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise the child, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived.

22 When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord **23** (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord"^[a]), **24** and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons."^[b]

25 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 on him. **26** It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. **27** Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, **28** Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

29

"Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. **30** For my eyes have seen your salvation, **31** which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: **32** a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel."

33 The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him. **34** Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, **35** so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."

36 There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, **37** and then was a widow until she was eighty-four.^[c] She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. **38** Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

39 When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. **40** And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.

1 Peter 2:4-12

New International Version (NIV)

4 As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him— **5** you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house^[a] to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. **6** For in Scripture it says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame."^[b]

7 Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, "The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,"^[c] **8** and, "A stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall."^[d]

They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for.

⁹ But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

¹¹ Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. ¹² Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.