

The Long Shadow of the Cross

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. 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, 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."

The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him. 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, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."

There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. 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. When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him.

In one of my former congregations, the preschool teacher told me about a conversation she had with potential new family for our preschool. At the end of the interview they made one request. They asked that we would not teach their child about the crucifixion of Jesus. It was too gruesome, they thought, for their four year old to hear. Our preschool teacher calmly responded that she could not honor their request. She explained that the cross is the very foundation of our church and faith. I give her a lot of credit. If we did not teach the cross, even to preschoolers, then we would cease being a church.

That is so true. The cross overshadows everything we believe and do. And in our text we will see the cross overshadowing even Christmas. Thank God it does. First, let's see how the cross overshadowed a man by the name of Simeon.

I. The shadow of the cross means we can die in peace.

"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. 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, 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.""

A baby is born. What do new parents do? Well, they need to apply for a social security number for the baby. They also have to set up a time for regular check ups and shots. What did they do in Jesus' day? The parents took the child to the temple. Why? Remember the tenth plague in Egypt, how the Angel of Death killed the first born male in Egypt? Remember how God spared the Israelites from this? Well from that time on all first born males, God said, belonged to him. The parents could redeem him or buy him back with an offering at the temple. Mary and Joseph did that with two turtle doves, the offering for couples of low income.

There they met a man named Simeon. He is described as one of those true believers who have been waiting for the salvation of God. But there was something special about him. He was blessed with special gifts from the Holy Spirit. Somehow the Holy Spirit told him he would not die until he had seen his Lord, the Christ. And one day the Spirit moved him to go into the temple courts at a particular time and there he saw Mary and Joseph and the baby Jesus.

Imagine being Simeon. He went to bed each night like a kid before Christmas, eagerly anticipating that tomorrow might be the day he meets the Christ. Why all the excitement? This Christ meant he could die in peace. We are all like Simeon. The life of every believer is a life of watchful waiting. We, too, were promised that in the end we will see the Christ. Like Simeon, this gives us peace. We live out each day, twisting and turning through all the bends and turns of life. Sometimes the road is pleasant. Sometimes it is awful. We run our race. Some finish early. For some it seems the race is endless. How many times have you heard an elderly aunt say, "They are all gone. My brothers, my sisters, my friends are all gone." Life can be very lonely. Humans make promises to try to make it easier through social security, assisted living, nursing homes, but often these promises fall far short.

But there is a peace from that God guarantees we can die in peace. We often think of Simeon as an elderly man. The text doesn't say that. He could have been quite young. He could have gone many more years before his death. But Simeon did die, but he died in peace, and he lived each day and hour leading up it in peace.

Death to many people is a topic to be avoided or postponed. But to anyone who has the eyes of faith, death means the best is coming. Death becomes that gate into a mansion prepared for us. This is what the cross means. Remember how Mary and Joseph had to redeem their firstborn male from the Lord? Well, Jesus came to redeem all of us. He didn't give two turtledoves. He gave his one life and one death on, you know where, the cross. That is how the cross casts its long shadow over Simeon and over us, a shadow that promises hope, joy and peace. We can die at anytime. We have seen our Christ.

The cross also casts its shadow on the world.

II. The world lives under the shadow of the cross.

"The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him. 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, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.""

It seems odd that Simeon, who spoke such glowing words of hope, suddenly changes gears and prophecies that not everyone will be happy with Jesus. Simeon lived under the cross and it filled him with such joy. The world lives under the same shadow of the cross, but they don't like it. Talk about Jesus the prophet and people might even quote him. Talk about Jesus as Lord and bring in the cross and people object. The cross of Jesus, as Simeon says, will reveal the thoughts of people. We will know whether they find peace in him or want to wage war.

It was beginning already. Between this text and the time Mary and Joseph and Jesus moved to Nazareth, you find the flight to Egypt and the massacre of the boys in Bethlehem by a paranoid and jealous King Herod. Jesus doesn't even know how to talk yet and evil people were plotting to get rid of him.

But it doesn't end there. How many times did people argue with Jesus or try to trick him? After the raising of Lazarus, after irrefutable evidence that he is God and everything he claims is true, they plotted to kill him. They wanted to kill Lazarus, too. Later they convinced a fickle Pilate to kill him. But it doesn't stop there. Down through the ages people have spoken out against him. They don't like the words that he suffered, died and was buried and on the third day rose again and that he is coming back as judge. They want to deny Bethlehem or turn it into something else like concern for the plight of the homeless.

So the cross reveals the hearts of people. They may tolerate Christmas, but bring up sin and the cross and you meet anxiety if not out right hostility.

It hurts, doesn't it, to see such hostile rejection. It would pierce Mary's soul to see her Son and her Savior treated as he was. And it hurts us. I am sure Simeon didn't enjoy saying this, but it didn't diminish his joy. Be like Simeon. Don't let the world's hostility ruin your joy. The Christ child of Bethlehem would be of little use to us if not for the grown Christ on Calvary. It is the same Christ, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, crucified, died and was buried, risen again, ascended into heaven and at God's right hand until he comes again. Remember how it says in John, that whoever believes in him will not perish, but whoever does not believe in him stands condemned already. The cross divides those two sections. The cross truly reveals how people truly feel about the Christ. Thank God you are on the right side of that divide.

III. So lift high the cross and let its shadow fall on the world.

So Christ, who is precious to us is hated by the world. What shall we do? We have an example to follow. ***"There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. 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. When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him."***

Anna is one of those special people you find in every congregation, that lady who spends so much time at church. Anna is a little different. She was a prophetess. God used her to tell his people things and to encourage them. But she was the one who was encouraged when she saw the child. I am sure he didn't look like much, but that didn't bother Anna. She knew God would accomplish much through this baby. Anna had a chance to see her Savior, and she told anyone and everyone.

So what can we do in a world that is offended by the cross? Do what Anna does. Give thanks to the Lord that we see this Child as the Christ and Savior. Serve God in church and outside Church. But hold high that cross so its shadow falls on everyone. Like Anna, let's speak to others of the salvation God has prepared for them.

The long shadow of the cross falls over everyone of every generation. It will reveal the hearts of everyone. May it reveal your what's in your heart, that you are thankful and devoted to the Lord who would redeem sinners like you and me. Amen.