

# Exegesis: Luke 2:28-32

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[Third in a Three Part Series]

"I can't take it anymore. Promises. Promises. Promises." Does anyone today make a promise which they intend to keep? Politicians make promises in the hope of getting elected. Companies make promises concerning their products in the hope of selling their wares to the public. Wedding couples make promises to each other in the hope of staying together. Why are promises seemingly easy to make but hard to keep? Is the promise made in and of itself the problem or is it the people making the promise? The answer to that particular question most likely would vary depending on the specific promise being talked about or the specific person being referred to.

Through the course of our ministries we have heard people make many a promise. Some of these promises made will be carried out, while others will not. How many couples have we joined together at the Lord's altar, they have promised to love and cherish each other until death, have broken those promises already? How many confirmands have we confirmed, they have promised to remain faithful to the Lord and make regular use of the Means of Grace, have in short order failed to live up to such a promise made before God and the congregation? How many promises have we ourselves made to our own families, promises to spend more time with them, only to have to go back on those promises due to unforeseen circumstances? If we are not sure that we can keep a promise, or if we have no intention of keeping a promise, ought we to make a promise in the first place?

What do "promises" have to do with today's paper up for discussion? Plenty! You and I make promises to one another, to our spouses, to our children - promises we may have to go back on – yet, there is One Person who can make a promise without having to take it back. You and I hear plenty of promises made by the members we serve – either on their confirmation day or their wedding day or even in their homes promising to come to church more often which may or may not be kept – however, there is One Person whose promises we can depend on without fail.

Simeon, "the man of the hour," in our Exegesis from Luke 2:28-32 not only heard the promises of God, believed them, but also saw the fulfillment of one very important promise – that of a Savior from sin and eternal death. Not only did this Simeon have a chance to see the fulfillment of such a gracious promise, he was able to hold in his very arms the promised Messiah.

Our promises can be broken on occasion, God's promises cannot be. God, then, is deserving of our thanks for His on-going faithfulness to the words of every promise He makes. Praise belongs to our God for giving us His holy Scriptures through which we are able to read and see the promises for ourselves. A great privilege you and I have as "ministers of the Gospel" is being able to continually hold God's promises before His flock of believers. A great opportunity you and I have as "ministers of the Gospel" is being able to share God's promises with many people who have not yet had the opportunity to hear and/or believe in those wonderful promises concerning life, protection, preservation, forgiveness and many others given for the benefit of mankind – spiritually most of all.

Are we ready to see along with Simeon the fulfillment of the promise recorded down in Genesis 3:15? Are we ready to say with Simeon, "Lord, through the giving of Your Son who became my Substitute I in faith am ready at anytime to depart in peace?" Are we ready to speak with conviction the Good News to all people? By the grace of God we are and will continue to be ready to serve Him, to worship Him, to share Him, to be with Him. We now turn our attention specifically to the uplifting words of Simeon, a devote servant of the Lord.

God had promised Simeon that he would be able to see the Son of God and Son of Man sometime before being called home to his eternal resting place. Did Simeon have any reason to doubt this promise? No! Simeon had been one of many faithful Israelites who knew that when the time was right God would send forth His Son.

Simeon was trusting in a promise God had made already to Adam and Eve back in the Garden of Eden after they themselves had fallen into the devil's trap of doubt, confusion, mistrust and plain out disobedience. Simeon held on to this promise of a Savior and in a few verses before our text up for study he was told by the Holy Spirit, "he (Simeon) would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ." When the time had come Simeon was moved to go to the temple courts. It was here that Simeon would meet Joseph and Mary and the baby Jesus. They had come to the temple so that the Law of the Lord ("every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord") could be fulfilled.

Verse 28 (NIV) Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

(Greek) καὶ αὐτὸς ἐδέξατο αὐτὸ εἰς τὰς ἀγκάλας καὶ εὐλόγησεν τὸν θεὸν καὶ εἶπεν

(JJK) And he received Him into the arms and praised God and said:

The καὶ, meaning "and" is continuative for it ties together what Simeon did upon arriving at the temple courts. This was all part of God's plan, that Simeon would go to the temple on that particular day and time in order to see the fulfillment of a promise regarding the Messiah. As we noted earlier it was not by accident that this event took place, God had promised Simeon a face to face encounter with the Messiah and He (God) kept that promise too.

The αὐτὸς, meaning "he", is a pronoun referring to Simeon. ἐδέξατο, "received" is an Aorist Middle Indicative of δέχομαι, and shows what he did with his arms did, he received the child one time, not a continuous action here. The word αὐτο', "Him", is a pronoun and here is used as the object of what is being received and held. εἰς τὰς ἀγκάλας "into the arms," with a specific article points to the fact that Simeon's arms were bent so as to receive something. In this case Simeon was receiving a very important and precious "Package" - the Lord Jesus Christ, Savior of the world from sin and the sting of death. καὶ, "and", is continuative tying together what is taking place. "Praised," εὐλόγησεν from εὐλογέω, is an Aorist Active Indicative. Simeon was praising God for allowing him to see the Christ-child and to hold him in his very own arms. Simeon definitely had reason to speak well of his God, a God who keeps His promises.

τὸν θεὸν, the article is specific but not translated here. God was the object of Simeon's blessing or words of praise, and well He ought to have been. God was not only to be the object of Simeon's praise but is to be from the mouths of all of His children as well. καὶ is continuative and the εἶπεν is a 2<sup>nd</sup> Aorist Active Indicative. Verse 29 is where we find what Simeon had to say now that he was able to receive the Lamb of God into his arms. But before we go there, here are a few other translations of verse 28:

(KJV) Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said

(NKJV) he took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said:

(GWN) Simeon took Him in his arms, praised God, and said:

Verse 29 (NIV) Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace.

(Greek) Νῦν ἀπολύεις τὸν δοῦλόν σου δέσποτα κατὰ τὸ ῥῆμά σου ἐν εἰρήνῃ

(JJK) now You dismiss Your servant, Lord, according to Your Word in peace.

God is over all and so we can have confidence, as Simeon had, in Him to make good on His promises. The promise of a Savior is vital to keep in mind for God did not leave His creation, going all the way back to Adam and Eve even, up a creek without a paddle (without hope). This hope has been passed down through the generations. People, including you and me, can get excited about this promise along with the fulfillment of that promise. Are we excited about it? Honestly? Unfortunately there are moments and days when this promise fulfilled is overlooked or forgotten. Fortunately, we have the Word before us so to refresh our hearts and minds; and then, in turn we can refresh the minds and hearts of those whom the Lord has called us to serve. Oh, what a wise God we have. We have a God who has given us reason to say with Simeon, "You now dismiss Your servant...in peace." Simeon's mind and heart were at rest. The anticipation was over for Jesus the Savior had come into the world.

Nῦν is an adverb which means "now." Now You, O Lord, can dismiss Your servant for You have kept Your end of the bargain. Simeon was ready to depart having his soul refreshed by seeing and holding the long awaited Messiah. He was renewed in his service to the Lord. He was ready for the Lord's call home at anytime now for the Messiah had been born. ἀπολύεις, Present Active Indicative of ἀπολύω, means "dismiss." The Lord can remove Simeon from this often filled "vale of tears" on earth and receive him into the everlasting joys of heaven where there will be no more weeping or hunger pains or aches in the joints. Simeon's work and life would now be complete, thanks to the grace of God. τὸν δοῦλόν σοι the article is specific and the pronoun is added for emphasis. Simeon was called to faith by God and he had been given the privilege of being able to serve His Lord. Simeon recognized that he was a servant of the God Most High. He had an attitude each one of us needs to keep in mind and put into practice for without God and His Word our ministries are in vain. As God refreshed Simeon, so too He refreshes us when and how we need it. We are to remember that we are His servants and He is the Master. He has the right to tell us what to do. We do not have the right to contradict Him. Yet, how many times throughout our professional and personal lives have we been tempted to do just that, to go against the Lord? What a time, when tempted to question or doubt God, to remember the fulfilled promise which Simeon was able to see. To God alone be the glory!

Why is God to get the glory? The word, δέσποτα, emphasizes that He is the Master of all who makes possible this event recorded in our text along with our coming to faith as well as our being able to serve His people. The preposition, κατὰ, with the Accusative points out where Simeon's hope came from or was based upon. τὸ ῥῆμά, is used instead of a ὁ λόγος, so to direct our attention to a specific word of God and not necessarily here the whole word of God (the entire Bible itself).

Whose word made Simeon hopeful and at rest? The pronoun, σου, clarifies this question for us. It is God's Word that is able to offer and give peace, rest and assurance with the news of sins forgiven not by the effort of humans but by the merit of Jesus alone. Now we get to a statement of fact and not just a request on Simeon's part.

ἐν εἰρήνῃ, "in peace." Simeon, along with all of God's Old Testament people, had waited a long time for the fulfillment of this promise. The day had finally arrived during Simeon's lifetime. God said He would deliver and deliver He did. He delivered a Savior, His One and Only Son, by which the hearts of people could be at rest. At rest not so much from the problems of this world, but even better, a rest from the guilty pangs of conscience as Jesus took all our guilty stains to the cross. Jesus paid for all of our sins by His death on the cross. Our sins have been left there at the cross so to never be brought against us. Jesus is rest. Simeon believed it. We believe it. Others are to believe it too. Notice the "iota subscript" in εἰρήνῃ, it is used when two vowels in one syllable.

Once again, here now is a look at other translations:

(KJV) Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word:

(NKJV) "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, According to Your word;

(GWN) "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace as You promised,

\* The Latin-based English of the words "now are letting depart" (or "now are dismissing") indicates why the church refers to Simeon's song (vv. 29-32) as the *Nunc Dimittis* (Now Dismissing).\*

Verse 30 (NIV) For my eyes have seen your salvation,

(Greek) ὅτι εἶδον οἱ ὀφθαλμοί μου τὸ σωτήριόν σου

(JJK) For my eyes have seen Your salvation,

The conjunction, ὅτι, meaning "for" explains to us why Simeon was now ready to depart this life in peace. He himself had been privileged to see the "salvation" promised by God to his forefathers and theirs before them. What an uplifting sight for "sore" eyes, to see and hold the baby Jesus in person. Many people in

our day long to see a professional athlete up close and personal. Some people are even willing to pay "good, hard earned money" to get an autograph of someone famous. Simeon did not have to pay out money or stand in long lines to see just "anyone." He was given the privilege to see Someone; namely the long expected Messiah, the Son of God. You and I would be hard pressed to top Simeon's encounter with the Lord.

Fortunately, you and I do not have to worry about that for we through faith in Jesus will be able to see Him face to face in heaven on the day we are called by God to our eternal home. The word, εἶδον, from ὀπάω, is an Aorist Active Indicative meaning "have seen." This was not a vision Simeon was having, he actually saw Jesus with his own two eyes. It was a completed action, that of seeing Jesus.

οἱ ὀφθαλμοί μου, the article being specific, emphasizes too that Simeon has been able to see the Lord himself. Someone else did not see Him and then report back to Simeon what he saw. "Eyes" is in the Nominative Case. The pronoun points out who the eyes belong to, Simeon. τὸ σωτήριόν, again the article is specific.

σωτήριόν means "salvation." Jesus was and is the means of deliverance for mankind from sin, death and the power of the devil. The pronoun, σου, points to whose idea this salvation was, God's. God made a promise which people were to latch on to. This promise had to do with life and salvation not by works but by faith. A faith not in just anything but in the saving work of Jesus, His perfect obedience and the giving of His own life on the cross. This means of deliverance through Jesus' blood and righteousness was God's idea, not man's. Man's methods of salvation or deliverance always focus back on himself, on what man has to do in order to help work out his or her getting right with God and into heaven. This false teaching regarding mankind's salvation is motivation for us, we who know that salvation depends on God and not man, to "hit the streets" through the pulpit and our members along with our own witnessing efforts. Door to door, we can and are to let people in on the Truth that can and will set them free, free by the grace of God. You and I do not have the Christ child right in visible form before us, but we do have His Word and His Word is sufficient for our ministry and life.

How do some other translations compare with each other?

(KJV) For mine eyes have seen thy salvation,

(NKJV) For my eyes have seen Your salvation

(GWN) because my eyes have *seen Your salvation*

Verse 31 (NIV) which you have prepared in the sight of all people,

(Greek) ὁ ἠτοίμασας κατὰ πρόσωπον πάντων τῶν λαῶν

(JJK) which (You) have prepared in the presence of all people,

ὁ is a relative pronoun, Neuter, Accusative. It goes back to the salvation God has allowed Simeon to see face to face in his arms. ἠτοίμασας, Aorist of ἐτοιμάζω, meaning "prepared." Once again, God gets the credit for this plan. The only plan which can bring about the salvation of souls. A plan which is able to cover the entire human population of the world – past, present, and future. A plan that has no hidden agenda, no fine print attached to it, no reason to give back refunds. κατὰ πρόσωπον, "in the presence of" or "before the face of." Mankind has been able to be aware of God's saving plan from its first revealing. It is a plan that is not just for a limited few or a chosen few, but for all people to hear and not only hear about but also come to trust in. God reveals to us, mankind, what we need to know for peace with Him and the way to heaven. πάντων is an adverb showing how many people are involved. τῶν λαῶν has the specific article. λαός is used to point out that the Jewish nation for sure had no excuse or had no legitimate reason on why not believing Jesus to be the promised Messiah. They, the Jewish people (the religious leaders especially), who claimed to know the Old Testament ought to have recognized the promised fulfilled in Jesus. Sadly, the hearts of many were hardened to this Person before them in Jesus.

Was Jesus just sent to save the Jewish nation? Before we get to verse 32 which has the answer to that question we will look at other translations of verse 31.

(KJV) Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people;

(NKJV) Which You have prepared before the face of all peoples,

(GWN) which You prepared for all people to see -

Verse 32 (NIV) a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for the glory to your people Israel."

(Greek) φῶς εἰς ἀποκάλυψιν ἐθνῶν καὶ δόξαν λαοῦ σου Ἰσραήλ

(JJK) a light to bring revelation for the Gentiles and of glory to Your people Israel."

What nationality was Luke, the writer of this Gospel we are looking at today? As a Gentile himself the Holy Spirit guides Luke to bring this point out as stated by Simeon. Jesus was not just for the Jews, He was also for the Gentiles. Jesus did not shed His blood for a select nation only, but for the nations of this world. As the Apostle Paul made reference to under inspiration in Romans 10:12, "For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile – the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him;" so too Luke is reminding his readers that Jesus is the way of salvation for Gentiles as well.

φῶς, "a light," is used to demonstrate the effect Jesus can have on people. He is able to open their eyes to the way of understanding, to show them the way of true wisdom. He is the wisdom that has made forgiveness and eternal life a reality. Jesus is the flashlight in a dark room. He makes life clear. He makes life worth every breath we are granted here on earth. With Jesus as the light of life we do not have to worry about power failures, He is dependable. It is we, with our sinful natures, who at times flicker in and out of the Light. "Oh, the height and depth of mercy; Oh, the length and breadth of love!" to quote the hymn writer of hymn 355 of *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal*. Jesus is more reliable than the "Energizer Bunny."

εἰς, with the Accusative means "to." ἀποκάλυψιν, is a revelation of truth here, Jesus is the "Light" the Gentiles need also. ἐθνῶν is a Dative, Indirect object. This word is used to include everyone who is a non-Jew. The καὶ is continuative and ties the word "light" to both parts of the sentence.

δόξαν, "glory." Great honor and praise belong to Jesus who is the promised Messiah for the entire human race. And because of Him God's people, all believers through faith in Jesus, will experience a better place than this earth. It will be better for in heaven there will be no mortgage payment to make, no alligators in the church to wrestle with, no tears of sorrow to shed. However, there will be laughter and singing and rejoicing around the throne of God.

Jesus is the One whom the Jews were to take pride in for He was their Savior too. He came from their line, their heritage. They could have rallied for One of their own for He was and is the promised Messiah who came down from heaven not to rescue the Jews from Roman oppression, but more importantly, to restore the severed relationship with God the Father. A relationship that had been severed when Adam and Eve disobeyed God's command not to eat of the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Is God hinting by these words that all Jews will be saved in the end? No, this is not being implied here. They too must acknowledge their need for a Savior and find that Savior in Jesus alone. But, the Jews (and Gentiles too) ought not to hang their heads in shame for God used this particular nation to bring about the means of salvation, Jesus. λαοῦ σου Ἰσραήλ, σου is a pronoun going with λαοῦ to show us whose people they are, they are God's people. Ἰσραήλ, simply points out the nation of Israel.

Other translations of verse 32 are:

(KJV) A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.

(NKJV) A light to *bring* revelation to the Gentiles, And the glory of Your people Israel."

(GWN) a *Light to shine on the Gentiles*, and the *Glory of Your people Israel*."

What does all this mean? Are we trying to say humans can never again make any promises? No, we are not trying to say that. Rather, let us realize that the promises we make before God, before our families, before our congregations are subject to the risks of being broken. We are not to give up making promises when the situation is appropriate for them, for we can strive with God's help in keeping them. Through our own broken promises and those of our members and those of our society let us not lose sight of the kept promises of God, especially the promise of salvation in Jesus. By faith in Jesus we, like Simeon, can confidently say when the time comes "Now dismiss, your servant in peace."

A closing thought is summed up in these words of hymn 269 verses 1-2 & 4 from *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal*:

In peace and joy I now depart As my Lord wills it;  
 Serene and quiet is my heart; Gladness fills it.  
 This the Lord has promised me, That death is but a slumber.

Christ Jesus brought this gift to me, My faithful Savior;  
 Whom you allowed my eyes to see By your favor.  
 Now I know he is my life, My friend when I am dying.

Christ is the hope and saving light Of those in blindness;  
 He guides and comforts those in night By his kindness.  
 He is Israel's righteousness, Their joy, reward, and glory.

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