



Consolation Arrives

Luke 2:22-40

Grace Church Waco | 12.27.20

Sergei Rachmaninoff, has anyone heard of him? Perhaps you are unfamiliar with the Russian composer, but for a moment I want you to pretend as if it is June 1, 1943, and you are attending his funeral. Rachmaninoff is a very famous 19th and 20th century composer by any metric. He was a man who experienced severe depression, which came across in different parts of his work. He also was forced to flee Russia at the height of the Russian Revolution at the turn of the century, and ended up in America, where he eventually was granted full citizenship. I am not well studied on his life by any means, but here is one thing I do know. There was one piece, one arrangement, that was so near to his heart that he requested that you, now surrounding his body in his casket, would hear it as his funeral. It is his rendition of “Nunc Dimittis”, which is simply the words of Simeon the Prophet put to music. Like the other songs of Luke 1-2, Simeon’s song is called “nunc dimittis” because in Latin that is the first words: “now you dismiss”. It’s a song that is right for a funeral, but not a tragedy. In Rachmaninoff’s version, which you would hear played at his funeral, it has the tempo of a lullaby: in and out, in and out.

Rightfully so, because it is sung over an infant. And today we come face to face with this song: a song of parting at the end of Simeon’s life, a song of peace that he may finally leave this earth, but it is not a song of death. It’s a song of birth, a lullaby. Can you grapple with that image: a lullaby for God? What might the Words of God’s lullaby be? Here we have them in **verses 29-32**.

“Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.”

What, to Simeon, is this song? It’s a song that fits well at the cradle and the cross. It’s a song sung over the baby Jesus: the promised one who sends off the way into peace, and a song to be sung over the crucified Jesus: the one who departs the world, if only for a few hours, by making peace between God and man.

To Simeon, this song is a song of consolation. We find this language in **verse 25**, that his whole life, he has been waiting for the consolation of Israel. The word in the original language means “a personal call, or a verdict” and has legal overtones. In other words, consolation is simply: the announcement of the final word. But all the times this word is used in the New Testament it’s exact interpretation varies by context. Different people need different verdicts. What is the personal



call of God that Israel needs? Well, it is consolation, our English word for *deep, personal comfort*. It is comfort that Simeon has been waiting for. He is uncomfortable, unable to rest, unable to be at peace, unable to fulfill that deep-seated longing in his heart, unable to die with the restful song of a lullaby, until he receives comfort from God. And as he holds the infant Christ in his hands, that is what he feels most of all. He looks into the baby's eyes and feels consolation. All his grieving and all his waiting has culminated in this moment: as he embraces the infant Christ, he feels the warm embrace of God himself. God the comforter. God our consolation.

Where do you need comfort? And where do you run to get it? Well, as we dive into our text this morning, we will see it through the lens of several sets of eyes: there is Joseph and Mary, the timid couple way out of their league, and there is Simeon, the comforted one, and Anna, the faithful one who is in the right place at the right time. But ultimately the set of eyes that matters most to us is the smallest ones. They are the only ones who can really bring us comfort: the eyes of Christ. So let's look into our text, through the eyes of our characters, into the eyes of the infant Christ, and let's consider three ways in which Jesus Christ is the consolation we need, our deepest comfort of all our fulfilled longings.

Born under the Law: the consolation of the the legalists (22-24)

How is Jesus Christ our consolation? First we see that by being born under the law, Christ is the consolation of the legalists.

Mary and Joseph are fresh from their experience in Bethlehem, and in no condition to travel. So they wait a while, presumably with kin in Bethlehem, before making the short climb up to Jerusalem. They come to Jerusalem for two reasons. First, our text tells us in **verse 22** they come for their purification. After giving birth, there is a waiting period before a woman is considered ceremonially clean again. So they are there to offer sacrifice so that Mary may resume her normal postpartum life among the people. They are also there, as **verse 23** tells us, to present the young Jesus to the Lord, as is the custom for firstborn males. The ritual is a call back to Passover, where God saved all the firstborn males by accepting in their place the blood of a lamb. To honor the Passover, a lamb was to be offered for every firstborn male shortly after his birth.

But if a lamb could not be afforded, it was acceptable to offer birds. This is pointing us to remember the poverty of Jesus' earthly family. He who was rich became poor. Although they are holding to the hope that their child is the chosen one of God, Mary and Joseph have no room for pretension. They are not exempt from the law, rather they are obedient to it. Jesus Christ, although the very Son of God, is born under the law in every way.

How is this good news? Remember what Paul says: Jesus Christ was born under the law to redeem us from the curse of the law. In other words, Jesus is showing here upon his presentation at the temple part of his purpose on earth. For years and years and years the people of God have been sacrificing lambs and birds for their firstborn sons. Year after year they long for comfort, but the only comfort they receive is the comfort of law: of rules and rituals. And here the Christ comes,



subjecting himself to the law, but not to show that he is ruled by the law. Rather, he submits himself to the law to show how he is to fulfill it, to be better than it. I love the intentionality of God here. Mary and Joseph are not wealthy enough to offer a lamb, but little do they know that they *are* offering a lamb. No lamb had to die for Christ, rather he is the lamb of God who has come to take away the sins of the world. It is through his material poverty that Jesus comes and says, even as an infant: a day is coming soon where there will be no more need for redemption lambs. The new passover will be celebration of my supper, of my exodus, of my blood sprinkled on the doorposts of the people.

What all of this is pointing to is that if you are stuck in legalism, trying to find comfort by following rules and rituals, Jesus Christ has come as your comfort and consolation. The way to God is not through what you can sacrifice, but through him who has been sacrificed for you. And that friends, is really good news, because we are so prone to want to prove ourselves, aren't we? We long for the false consolation of our moral resumes. But in the words of the apostle, they are filthy rags! True comfort does not come in adherence to the law, it comes via the freedom of Christ. Let that give you a breathe of fresh air for a moment: breathe it in. God your comforter has freed you from the curse of having to always prove yourself, and now you are free to serve him with zeal and passion. The weight isn't on your shoulders, you are not the sacrificial lamb. Lean on Christ, church.

Born at Last: the consolation for the waiting (25-33)

The second consolation of Jesus Christ we see in our text is found in the song of Simeon. By being born at last, Christ is the consolation for the waiting.

Simeon's story is powerful. He is not just anxious for the Messiah, **Verse 25** tells us he is righteous and devout, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. The language here seems to imply not just that the Holy Spirit came upon him, but that it rested upon him continually, an incredibly rare thing to say in these days before Pentecost. No doubt, Simeon was known as an odd bird. How many were in Simeon's shoes? How many righteous men were left in Israel? Not many, since very few followed Jesus in his earthly ministry.

Perhaps the reason being devout in these times was so rare is because Israel had been waiting so long. Simeon is of the generation of waiters: God has been silent for hundreds of years. No major prophets, no murmurings of Messiah. But still, Simeon is steadfast. He will not surrender his hope, he won't give himself over to peace or to death until he sees the Lord's anointed. We are not given the details, but whether it is through spiritual intuition, through a dream or vision, or through some other means, Simeon has been told by the Holy Spirit that Messiah is near: he will come in his lifetime, and he will see him with his own eyes.

We are not told how long Simeon had to wait, but you can imagine how hard it was at times. Perhaps he had waited so long that his eyesight had begun to fail him. There were no prescription glasses in those days. I like to imagine that in order to see the Christ, he *had* to take him in his arms, up to his face. Each day to him was like a thousand, as he lived with anticipation. Some days, he may have been full of hope, believing that perhaps today he would see Messiah. And some days



were long and hard and burdensome, and he wondered: am I foolish to believe that this could really happen?

But God preserved Simeon by his Spirit. It was the Spirit that led Simeon to the temple on the precise day, **verse 27** tells us. I think it is implied to that it was the Spirit that led Simeon to Jesus/ Perhaps he heard the rumors, but his path was not as clear as the shepherds or the magi. God led him directly to his Christ, God was faithful to Simeon in his waiting, God came through. Simeon not only got to see the Christ, he took him in his arms and blessed him. Think of it, Simeon got to bless God in the flesh.

His blessing, as mentioned before, is a lullaby, a song of peace. Now his waiting is over, now his comfort has come, now his earthly mission is over. What has Simeon seen? He says it is the salvation of God, a light and glory not just for Israel, but for the Gentiles too. See, by the Spirit Simeon sees that it is not just Israel who needs comfort. There are others like Simeon, those whom God has mercy on, those who look to the sky for answers, those who long for divine comfort. Christ has come for those too, his people near and far, of every race and tribe and tongue.

The gospel being preached by Simeon is that Christ has come for *all* who wait. No wonder Mary and Joseph marveled at this in **verse 33**: the promise of salvation to Gentiles was not something that was easily swallowed. It would not have been a wise policy position at the time. But God works in mysterious ways.

What we should take away from Simeon's story is the gospel for those who have waited for a long time. We are a young congregation generally, perhaps we haven't felt the long arc of time so severely yet. But perhaps we have when we think about it. Think about the friend or family member who you have been praying for for years to come to Christ, but no avail. Hope is harder and harder to come by. Think of that sin that clings year after year, maybe it's your anxiety, or your addiction to pornography, or your tendency to tear down perfectly good relationships. Year after year, it is harder to be righteous in your waiting. We are a society primed for instantaneous results.

But the consolation of Christ is that, even as an infant, he preaches comfort for the waiting. He says: not much longer. He says: your waiting is not in vain. He says: heaven has invaded earth, it's only a few days before the victory is realized. What Simeon felt in that moment, as he held the baby Christ in his arms, is what we will feel when we enter into the presence of God at the end of this world or the end of our life: complete peace. It's coming sooner than you think.

And also, in the gospel we understand that the peace of Simeon is the peace we are offered *now*. We can face death, we can face sin, we can face the darkness of this world, because our eyes by faith *have* seen the salvation of the Lord. Jesus Christ walked up a hill to plant his cross and bleed to death, not so that your salvation might be possible, but that it might be secured. You do not have to wonder: will my hope be put to shame? Because God has proven himself forever in the death and resurrection of Christ. So have faith, church, in our waiting. I know it's hard, I know it's long, but eternity is forever. And it's coming soon.



Born to Reveal: the consolation for the faithful sufferers (34-40)

The third consolation of Christ is that in being born to reveal all things, he is the consolation for the faithful sufferers.

Mary and Joseph are given a strange prophecy by Simeon after his song of praise and peace. **Verse 34-35** brings reality to the forefront. Although this child will bring salvation for God's people, it won't be easy. There will be a division: some in Israel will accept him and rise, but many will reject him and fall. He will be a sign, a sign of God's faithfulness, but he will also be opposed. Notice the reasoning that he will bring division: so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed. Simeon, led by the Spirit, is prefiguring the words of Jesus in Luke 12: those who hear his message "will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother." In other words, his message cannot be half accepted, He is going to bring everything out into the open, everyone's true colors will be revealed. This is what 1 Peter means when it calls Christ "a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense". You either fall before this Christ, or you reject him.

Notice too his words for Mary. He says "a sword will pierce your soul too." No doubt he is being led to prophesy about the death of Jesus: the one who was pierced for our transgressions. His death is of particular importance to Mary, the one who brought him life, because it is at that very moment that she will suffer the most doubt. At the cross, as she saw her baby son be pierced even though he was innocent, it is likely she doubted her whole life: could the words of the angel Gabriel really be true? Is this how the Christ is to be treated? Oftentimes the piercing of doubt is much more painful than any physical pain we can suffer.

But there is no evidence Mary's faith failed in that moment. There is no reason to believe it did, not just because the gospel writers do not specify, but also because her faith has already been proven multiple times over, even at a young age. She believes the angel, she believes enough to carry the Christ in her womb, and she stores and treasures his birth in her heart for moments just as the one prophesied. Mary suffers, but she does so silently and faithfully.

There is another silent and faithful sufferer in our story too. It's Anna, who never speaks in the narrative, but whose actions speak volumes. **Verse 36** tells us she was a prophetess, a rare gift! And not only that, but for her entire adult life, for decades and decades, she has been alone, a widow. She has no home, no one to provide for her. And so she makes her home in the temple. It's likely that the text reads not that she is 84 years old, but that she has been widowed for 84 years. Given that a normal time for marriage for a young woman is around 15 years of age, and she was married for 7 years before her husband's death, Anna may be as old as 106 years. All this time, living in the temple, still fasting, still praying.

To Anna, the suffering she has experienced is not something to complain about before others. No doubt she suffered silently, not parading around as a victim but rather making her requests known to God in prayer. She is the perfect picture of the millions of godly saints who go unnoticed into



glory, faithful for years to endure to the end and to run their race, not for the glory or reward of renown on earth, but to be known by God. Anna is a model to us, a picture of a life well lived.

How can I say Anna lived a good life, when she was lonely and poor for so many years? Because Anna says it. **Verse 38** tells us of God's impeccable timing. All these years unnoticed, and then she notices something, something that causes her, the text says, to give thanks for her life. All her years are not in vain, because she has the honor of being a witness of Christ, to speak of him to all the faithful ones waiting for him. She gathers up everyone she knows who has silently suffered as she has and let's them know: redemption is here. Your suffering is not in vain. You might say that Anna is the oldest community group leader on Biblical record. Anna, like Mary, is a silent sufferer. But she receives the consolation of Christ.

Let's go back to the idea of Christ being the divisive revealer of thoughts and hearts. Why is that good news to those who silently and faithfully suffer? Because it says that all will be revealed in time. The rejecters of Christ might have the nice, comfortable, popular life now. But the gospel says that in Christ's kingdom, all will be shown to be what it really is. Those who reject him will be rejected, and those who have been faithful to him in the shadows will be comforted and welcomed in.

So let me give you the consolation of Christ. Even as an infant, Jesus was preaching that none of your faithfulness is in vain. It's never worthless to turn from selfish ambition and towards Christ. It may not be sexy to take up your cross, it's certainly not going to be understood. These days you are not only more and more likely to be called a fool for following after an ancient Jewish man, you may even be called hateful, bigoted, closeminded, immoral. The world will not praise you for holding fast to Biblical sexuality, and it won't rejoice when you reject the instant pleasure of easy sex for the hard paths of lifelong marriage or singleness. No news outlet is going to write an interest piece on you for standing firm on the idea that Jesus Christ is the only way to eternal life. But your faithfulness in the dark will one day be brought into the light. And then you will be commended, not by man, but by God.

So keep going. Keep fighting for faithfulness when no one notices. Keep sacrificing your time for the church body. Keep rejecting financial gain for the sake of God's purposes. It may hurt, it may feel like a sword in your soul. But your suffering savior was rejected for you. He knows how it feels, and he did it so that he could purchase for you something far better than success or comfort now. He suffered to purchase you for himself.

I'll end in this way this morning church. It's a few days after Christmas, and it's supposed to be a time of peace and joy. Advent is over, our longing is complete. But oftentimes after Christmas we are conditioned to feel a letdown. We've put a little bit of our hope in the holiday season, and not in the coming of Christ. Most radio stations pull their Christmas music off the air the day after Christmas. But friends, *this* is the CHristmas season, not the time leading up to Christmas.



So if today, in any way, you need comfort and consolation, if in any way you feel let down, you feel overcome with the burden of measuring up, you feel like you can't wait any longer to be rid of this world, or you feel like all your faithful suffering is going unnoticed, enter into the peace of Christmas.

Christ has come, died and was raised for our redemption, and if you trust in him by faith, you may depart at any time in complete peace. Nothing is holding you here except the providence and plan of God. And when you are that free, free from death, free from the law, free from sin, well then the waiting and suffering of this world seems a lot lighter doesn't it? Now you are seeing rightly: it is light. It's always been light, because Christ has always been carrying the burden. He is singing over you, just as Simeon sang over him. He is holding you, just as Simeon held him. And his song is gentle and lowly, it's a whisper of love and protection. It says: I see you, I know you, I suffered for you. The invitation to you is to come this Christmastime and listen to his lullaby, his song of peace, and to rest.

